

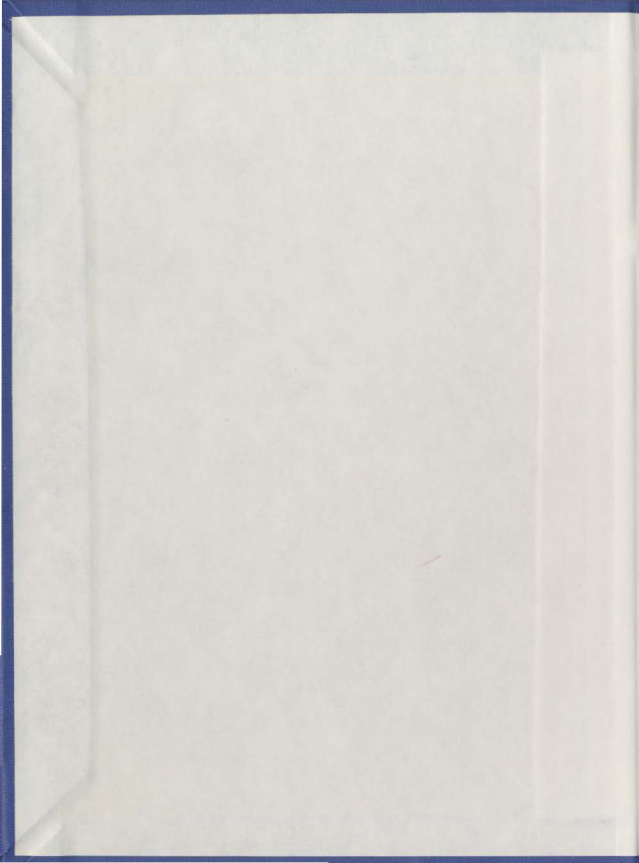
WOMEN'S STATUS IN POST-REVOLUTIONARY CHINA

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WOMEN'S STATUS IN POST-REVOLUTIONARY CHINA

by

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of the requirements for the degree of  
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## ABSTRACT

Like other traditional societies, women in traditional China had a low status. It is evident particularly in the traditional family settings for family has long been the basic social unit in Chinese society. The degrading status of the Chinese women in the past was the consequence of three major factors: the agricultural mode of production, patrilineage and Confucian ethics. The first section of the thesis discusses the traditional subordination of the female sex in the family as well as in economic, educational and political spheres.

With the impact of the new idea of sex-equality from the West, the status of women in Chinese society began to improve. Though under the Chinese National regime efforts to improve women's status were begun, many measures intended to foster greater sexual equality were not fully carried through. Significant progress in emancipating women came only through the administration of the Chinese Communist government. The measures carried out since then have given Chinese women greater rights in marriage and divorce, property ownership, welfare services, participation in occupational, educational and political fields, etc. The thesis discusses the historical development of the women's emancipation movement under Communist direction.

The final section of the thesis compares the status of women in new China with female emancipation in the U.S.S.R. and raises questions about the future possibilities and obstacles to further change. Women's emancipation in modern China seems to depend heavily on whatever policies the governing regime takes. It is hard to predict what future achievement the women in modern China will have on their ways striving for their equality with men.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The socio-economic basis of Chinese society has long been agricultural. It needs a large labour force to work in the fields. According to Ester Boserup's anthropological analysis, women have been found to be predominantly doing the agricultural work when shifting agriculture was prevailing.<sup>1</sup> But in Asia, the continuing demand for greater productivity led to the adoption of plough cultivation and "a large portion of women in the cultivator families (were) completely exempted from work in the fields."<sup>2</sup> They mainly contributed to the harvest work and the caring of domestic animals. They had become more secluded from outside work and more confined at home. Thus, this form of production "represented a significant break with the past, and was to have effects upon the status of women so dramatic that they linger to the present day."<sup>3</sup>

In sum, according to Boserup's argument, the change from shifting agriculture to plough cultivation, wherever it occurred, threw women into seclusion and confinement. With this shift in the mode of production in the agricultural system, a large proportion of women were exempted from outdoor work which was taken up by men. However, that did

not lessen much of the burden of work for women. In fact, that shift had doubled the workload of women in the sense that they had to collect feed for the animals and to feed them. Besides, they had to take care of the household chores as well as the agricultural work at harvest times. Consequently, women in agricultural systems had become economically dependent on men. Their overall status was lower than what it used to be when shifting cultivation was prevailing.<sup>4</sup>

Boserup's argument throws an interesting light upon the status of women in China, a predominantly agricultural country in Southeast Asia. China has for long assigned a sex-segregated sphere for women and girls. A woman in traditional Chinese society had no legal status at all, she had no property rights either. Indeed, "the property-less woman of China was herself the property of man."<sup>5</sup> It was not uncommon to see women and girls being sold and bought as commodities.<sup>6</sup>

Girls were seen as potential deserters in their families. Women and girls were so degraded that female infanticides were believed to have been practised in the poor peasant families. It is true to say that, "in old China the subservience of women started at birth."<sup>7</sup> New born females were often taken as a mark of the parents' shame. It is not uncommon to find that some parents were forced to hide "the new born female (babies) under the bed."<sup>8</sup>

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The fate of being a woman in traditional Chinese society was so sad that even the poets often bemoaned their sad fates. As Pu Hsuan (a third century Chinese poet) wrote:

"How sad it is to be a woman  
Nothing on earth is held so cheap  
No one is glad when a girl is born  
By her family sets no store."<sup>9</sup>

Thus, it seems even more obvious to describe the position of most women in traditional China as "Slave of the slaves".<sup>10</sup> Not surprisingly Mao Tse-tung analyzed Chinese women's oppression as being bound by "Four Thick Ropes". He held that a man in China was usually dominated by the political, the clan and the religious authorities, but women had to face the authorities of the husband, in addition to these three.<sup>11</sup>

The low status of women in the past can also be seen in the fact that, "(they were) the last to have a doctor called for them in time of illness ...",<sup>12</sup> besides being bought and sold as wives and cheap labour.

In the traditional Chinese family system, it was almost a rule that the position of women was unenviable in the family relationships where no significant reference was made to the female members. Girls usually served their parents until marriage. They were regarded as insignificant. After marriage, their roles were usually more down-trodden -- notably under the domination of their husbands as well as their mothers-in-law.<sup>13</sup> It is quite true to say that the status of women in traditional Chinese society might be

rather low. At least it was shown through the situations  
in the family which has been the basic unit of Chinese  
society.

## CHAPTER II.

### INFLUENCES PREVAILING IN TRADITIONAL CHINESE SOCIETY THAT AFFECTED THE STATUS OF WOMEN

#### CONFUCIANISM: ITS INFLUENCES ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE FAMILY AND IN TRADITIONAL CHINESE SOCIETY

Confucian ethics advocates male-supremacy. This furthered the deterioration of the status of women and girls of both the gentry and the peasantry classes.

Among the poor peasant families, female-infanticides were practiced. It is not surprising to find Sidel stressing that in pre-Liberation China, a new born female baby or a girl had to face the destiny of uncertain survival.

"Female babies were an economic liability; they would never become part of the family's work force and would only bring a marriage price."<sup>14</sup>

That was perhaps the common cause for the cruel practice of infanticides.

Births of female babies were generally regarded as losses. The influences of Confucianism were fully manifested in the majority of corporate families. In the corporate families, the family ties were influential. Indeed,

"the strength of the Confucian family ideal is indicated by the fact that whenever the economic plight of the lower and peasant classes improved, their families increased in size, their family

relationships were patterned according to Confucian tradition ..."<sup>15</sup>

The traditional Confucian Chinese society was characterized by the existence of a common system of values.<sup>16</sup> Such system was enhanced by the Chinese family organization which was also dominated by Confucian doctrine stressing the importance of family continuity.<sup>17</sup> It is a matter of fact that,

"the individual life of a traditional Chinese (male) was conceived as the prolongation of his father and grandfathers, and he assumed that his own progeny would transmit the individual in him to eternity."<sup>18</sup>

It is also noteworthy that the teaching of Mencius who was Confucius' disciple had included in his teaching that "there are 3 unfilial acts; the greatest of these is the failure to produce sons."<sup>19</sup> Such a teaching had long been the backing force for the male-supremacy in pre-Liberation China.

Besides, it had long been held that,

"the purpose of marriage was to produce male heirs to perpetuate the paternal grandparents' family, to ensure the continuity of the husbands' family structure, and to provide additional work power of the son - and daughter-in-law. The preference for male children, the importance of descendants through male line, and the young wife's moving in with the paternal in-laws are further evidences of male dominance."<sup>20</sup>

Moreover,

"Confucian doctrine prescribed a strictly hierarchial system of relationships rooted in the family but extending to all relationships, including that of the emperor to his subjects. The basic principles for the social order were formulated in the 'Five

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### Cardinal Relations<sup>†</sup>".

This has laid down the basis of the subordination of women to men as well as a strict division of labour between the sexes. This basis was the foundation upon which the traditional Chinese society was organized. Indeed, traditional Chinese society dominated by Confucian ethics, "greatly restricted the association between the sexes, described men as superior, and placed all women in a subordinate position to men."<sup>21</sup>

It is noteworthy that the potential development of women under the Confucian Chinese family pattern was greatly limited for centuries. They were to be subordinate to the male members inside the family, and were submitting to

"strictly defined limits in interpersonal relationships in a social order marked by a rigid hierarchy of relationships, feudal privileges, great discrepancy in the distribution of wealth, and domination of the young by the old."<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, it was the Confucian belief that family culture was the basis of social order. It was believed that,

"if an individual was taught to respect the authority of family elders he would automatically transfer the same obedience and loyalty to the emperor and representatives of the state ... that to strengthen kinship ties is to strengthen the state as well."<sup>23</sup>

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\*According to Mencius, in "the relations of humanity -- between father and son, there should be solidarity and affection; between sovereign and minister, righteousness; between husband and wife, attention to separate functions; between old and young, a proper order; and between friends, fidelity." (As quoted by Yang, in Chinese Communist Society: The Family and the Village, p. 7.)



Thus, the corporate form of family organization has long been fully developed and been backed up by Confucianism.

This type of family organization is sometimes called clan or tsu. (Further details of this type of family organization will be touched upon in the next section.) It was this type of family organization that fully manifested the "male-supremacy" and patrilineal character that seldom allowed room for women and girls. With a family organization like this, women were to lead an enclosed life and have a very low position.<sup>24</sup>

In traditional Chinese society, women's decision-making power was closely related to the value system deeply entrenched in the family organization. Indeed, traditional China was characterized by marked segregation of sex roles with distinctly corresponding behaviour. Besides, "the roles for various family members can be described in detail according to the specific age groups to which they belonged."<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Confucian ethics stressed that "obedience, timidity, reticence, adaptability" were the main virtues of women. A woman's life was shaped by three rules of obedience emphasizing that an unmarried girl must obey her father and elder brother; a married woman must obey her husband, and a widow must rely on and obey her son.<sup>26</sup> Generally speaking, "in the family patterns of 'traditional' China the locus of power and responsibility was overwhelmingly in the hands of the males."<sup>27</sup> Not only so, the power

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held by the male side of the family was always supreme. They held the ultimate responsibility for the whole family. No matter how much responsibility and power a woman had within the household, this was always as a delegate of the male, her husband. Not surprisingly, Sidel has stressed that in pre-Liberation China women were nearly slaves. They had to suffer from the male-supremacy as well as the domination of the older females in the family.<sup>28</sup> Thus it is not too surprising to see that the Confucian code of ethics was criticized as discriminatory against women during "the Movement to criticize Confucius and Lin Biao" held in Communist China from 1974 to 1975. Confucius was then criticized for stressing male-supremacy and taking the relationship between men and women as that of master and slave.<sup>29</sup>

All in all, the criticism against Confucius by the Chinese Communists was not without sufficient ground. Indeed, Confucianism was almost the source of all values and ideas that degraded the status of women in traditional Chinese society and families.<sup>30</sup>

#### PATRILINEAGE: ITS INFLUENCES ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN FAMILY AND SOCIETY

Apart from Confucianism, the traditional Chinese society itself has long been characterized by a type of family structure which is patrilineal in nature. It does

not mean that the patriarchal family structure is a characteristic of China alone. However, "the Chinese family had unique traits and was perhaps the most extreme expression of the patriarchal family in history."<sup>31</sup>

A vivid picture of such patriarchal nature was evident among the traditional Chinese gentry "stem" or "joint" families. Owing to the presences of filial piety and, most important of all, the practice of ancestor worship, Chinese families were prevented from breaking down into simple conjugal units. In fact, the "stem" or "joint" families remained to be important in the institutional structure of the traditional Chinese society. With the close relationship existing between these "stem" family units, they could integrate into a clan or tsu. The clan or tsu was a form of family organization that took up most of the important welfare and judicial functions.

To be more precise, the clan or tsu operated "generally through a council of elders and intervened in those matters which could not be handled adequately by individual families."<sup>32</sup>

Its major function was to take charge of the maintenance of the ancestral graves and the ancestral tablets. It also performed certain judicial functions or enforcements like arbitrating disputes within the tsu and enforcing its rulings.

The tsu collected taxes for the government. Besides, it protected tsu members -- all persons with a common surname of the common ancestor, from outside aggression.

In addition, the tsu carried out a wide range of welfare functions, utilizing the income from the property and land held for such functions.

"It paid for the education of an occasional bright son from a poorer branch of the tsu and thus supported some upward mobility in the society. It loaned money to tsu members. It also helped families to organize and pay for lavish weddings and funerals."<sup>33</sup>

Thus the clan or tsu was indeed both an important political and economic organization in traditional Chinese society.<sup>34</sup>

It is noteworthy that the extension or expansion of the clan or tsu took place along the male line rather than the female line. Such phenomenon had long been enhanced by the fact that

"the initiation of the child in the family, its treatment during (ying-erh shih-chi), and its subsequent development are strikingly conditioned by the child's symbolic importance. One of the most important processes which continues throughout life is the differential treatment on the basis of sex."<sup>35</sup>

By and large, infant girls were welcome in families where there was no economic problem, and actual differential treatment of children on sex-basis was less likely than in poor peasant families. But although no distinction was drawn on the basis of sex, differentiations in treatment began at the age of three or four onward. It was apparent in the socialization process where restrictions on girls

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\*In cases which infanticide was practised, it was inevitably girls who suffered this fate (as footnoted in Levy, Marion, J. Jr. The Family in Social Context, N.Y.: Octagon Bks., Inc., 1963, p. 67).

were greater than on boys. Girls were expected to avoid being alone in the presence of men beginning at this age.<sup>36</sup>

Though the majority of Chinese families never managed to achieve the Confucian ideal of uniting several generations of male descendants under one roof, nevertheless the father's line of descent and the father's family were the foci of kinship interest. As a result, sons were expected to carry on the line. Moreover, in regards to inheritance of property as well as residence, they were all patrilocal. Such a family system was also patronymic and patriarchal.<sup>37</sup>

The most important relationship was that between father and son which was a kind of authority-submission relationship. The similar type of relationship existed between the older and younger brothers.<sup>38</sup>

However, it is noteworthy that under the influence of the Confucian ethics, the extended form of family, the joint-family, in particular, has not always been solely the ideal family organization, but also the most important form in China. In such form of family organization, the oldest male of the oldest generation almost always assumed the role of being the head of the family. Patrilineal relationships were the most significant and dominant within it. Again,

"the woman was cast in one role that a man did not experience, namely, that of changing from the family in which she was reared, her family of orientation,

to the family in which she reared children of her own, her family of procreation. The two families were not separate for the man."<sup>39</sup>

Thus, a woman was generally put to a role of having to break with one family and be married into another as a stranger. The latter role was regarded as crucial to the entire kinship structure.

Furthermore, the patrilineal structure of the Chinese family system though has provided great stability for the family as a whole and for Chinese society in general, yet it has also raised stresses and insecurity for the Chinese women. This perhaps also had to do with the male-supremacy that always accompanied patrilineage.

#### FOOT-BINDING

The effects of Confucian ethics and patrilineage had really been influential in traditional Chinese society. They had been embedded in and elaborated through a series of degrading practices held toward the women and the girls in the past.<sup>40</sup> One of the most striking bits of evidence of the subordination of girls and women was the practice of foot-binding.

Foot-binding was a symbol of the subservience of women as well as being a rather inhumane practice. Such a practice had quite a long history in China which began in the tenth century. This first came out as a custom

connected with the gait of court dancers in the imperial harem of the T'ang dynasty. Although during the Manchus' rule foot-binding was opposed, yet attempts to eradicate it were unsuccessful and sporadic.<sup>41</sup>

Starting at a very young age at about six, a girl's feet were bound. This turned her toes under her feet and held them in position by tightly wound bandage. One can imagine how extremely painful a little girl would have been with her young feet bound in that way. Not surprisingly, quite often

"those little girls ... try to tear the bandage away in order to gain relief from the torture; but their temporary removal, it is said, greatly increases the pain by causing a violent revulsion of the blood to the feet."<sup>42</sup>

The painful experience of such practice of countless girls and women in Chinese history is vividly revealed through the following description.

"My feet hurt so much that for 2 years I had to crawl on my hands and knees. Sometimes at night they hurt so much that I could not sleep. I stuck my feet under my mother and she lay on them so they hurt less and I could sleep. But by the time I was eleven my feet did not hurt and by the time I was thirteen they were finished."<sup>43</sup>

As the feet were bound in that way for years, they could not grow to full size and the bone structure was deformed. The consequence was that adult women with both feet bound had to walk on three-inch stumps.<sup>44</sup> This kind of practice was widely carried out in most parts inside China at least until the twentieth century. Until then, "the pain and the disability of foot-binding were a normal

part of childhood" -- except among the minority peoples.<sup>45</sup>

Principles or Motives Behind the Practice of Footbinding

For beauty's sake. This inhumane practice was enhanced by the rationale holding that girls and women with small feet were regarded as beautiful; those with unbound feet could hardly be married out.<sup>46</sup> Though such practice was prohibited under the rule of the Manchu government as well as from 1911 onward, it did not die out all at once. It was still practised in some northern villages in pre-Liberation China.

In these areas, there were attitudes holding that, "women with feet bound had to assume a gingerly gait (because of the pain of movement) which was said to be graceful, and the feet themselves were said to have great sexual appeal for the men."<sup>47</sup>

It is also true that even after 1911 there were still some areas in the northern villages,

"where small feet and the swaying walk they imposed were considered beautiful and were necessary if a girl was to make a good match."<sup>48</sup>

As one modern author stated,

"like a fair complexion, thin eyebrows, and a gentle voice, the gait peculiar to a woman whose feet were not permitted to grow had sexual appeal."<sup>49</sup>

For confining women at home. It is made explicit in Nü Erh Ching that:

"Feet are bound, not (only) to make them beautiful as curved bow, but (also) to restrain the women when they go outdoors."<sup>50</sup>



Indeed, the other rationale for such inhumane practice came from the fact that with the feet bound to small size, it would be difficult or rather impossible for women and girls to move freely around without the help of a maid or any person. This took away a basic freedom of movement for many women and girls.

This confinement of the female sex to their own homes symbolized their subordination. "They could seldom venture outside except by being carried on sedan chairs."<sup>51</sup> Staying at home was equated with female virtue. That is, "a good girl does not go beyond her boudoir."<sup>52</sup>

It is noteworthy that the popularity of such practice tended to vary according to different geographical localities as well as different social-class backgrounds. It has been observed that generally speaking, this practice tended to be followed more tightly and vigorously in big cities and towns and by families of higher social-class background.

On the other hand, this practice was not tightly applied to women of poorer classes. That was mainly because of the economic necessity for them to participate in work outdoors. This had been particularly true in the south where women often had to work barefoot in the fields. Thus foot-binding was one of the upper-class customs passed on to the peasants and assimilated by them; the peasants, however, had to modify it in order to accommodate to the

necessities for making their living. At this point, it is noteworthy that in some ways, higher family background gave more freedom to women of the rich families, e.g. more education opportunities; but in some other ways, these women were more confined, e.g. the practice of foot-binding was widely practised among the rich families.

Women whose feet were bound and who were kept at home as a less movable property of rich males, were, in a sense, an item of conspicuous consumption. This was an often-recognized fact. Indeed,

"to be crippled like this in a pre-industrial economy in which a peasant's income depended at least partly on strength was to be crippled economically as well."<sup>53</sup>

In sum, foot-binding had both esthetic and economic reasons behind it. These further strengthened the common value holding that the girls and women with small feet were beautiful and that also symbolized their better or richer family background.

### CHAPTER III

#### STATUS OF GIRLS AND WOMEN AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF FAMILY LIFE

##### BEFORE MARRIAGE

It is rather apparent that the low status of Chinese women and girls in traditional time was fully manifested through their general situations in families. All through the different stages of their life cycles, women and girls were greatly restricted and confined by the value systems dominating the families.

As aforementioned, starting from the time when they were born, female infants were generally degraded. They had to face their own destinies. Social class was an important modifier of gender experience. There were variations in treatments for female infants born to a rich family and those born to a poor family. Although they were regarded as less valuable than male infants, infant girls were more welcomed in rich families than in poor families (provided that the infant girl was not the first born child to the family). This was the direct consequence of the patrilineage and male-supremacy enhanced by Confucianism.

If sons were a necessity, daughters were a "luxury", the girls of the rich families were more free to enjoy. Even

if an infant girl was welcomed in a rich family however, the treatments she received were different from those an infant boy was to receive.

The most significant difference could be seen in the ceremonial celebration for the initiation of a male child (as compared with that for a female child) into the family. Such a difference was not so obvious in the peasant families. Perhaps that was because "the restricted means of the peasants eliminated much of the ceremony ...."<sup>54</sup> However, it is noteworthy that infant girls in the peasant families had to face a greater trial for their survivals. It was because usually the poor peasant families were those that practised infanticide on new born girls.

The actual differentiation of sex roles began to take shape after the first year or two of the Ying-erh Shih-Ch'i (the first three years after birth). More obvious differentiation came out in the stage coming after this. That is the Yü-nien Shih-Ch'i (approximately 3 years old to the early fifteen and sixteen).<sup>55</sup> Just after the Ying-erh Shih-Ch'i, boys were trained to assume that they were superior to girls. They were usually trained with greater formalities of interpersonal relationships and rituals.<sup>56</sup> Such differential practices were more rigid in the rich families than in the peasant families. Once again, this was perhaps because the peasant families had great economic needs. They really could not stress very rigidly the sex-role differentiations if male and female members had to work together for the

economic security of their families.

However, it does not mean that in the peasant families there was not any sex-segregated division of labour. In fact, the peasant girls confined most of their time in household work.

"(They) appeared in the fields only during periods of great activities, such as planting and harvest. At times when extra help was needed, both wives and daughters went to help the men."<sup>57</sup>

The peasant girls at this stage of development were increasingly able to experience their relative insignificance in their families. They began to be aware of the fact that they were finally to be married out of their families. This feeling gave them a sense of impermanence. This feeling was particularly strong to the peasant girls rather than to the gentry girls. The peasant girls had a feeling that they were an economic burden to their own families in the sense that the care and money spent on them were wastages to their families' resources. This was explicitly experienced at the time when these peasant girls reached the age for marriage. That was the time a cash outlay for a girl's dowry would be needed. For a gentry family, such an outlay could be afforded. This was perhaps the reason that a gentry girl seldom felt herself as a real economic burden to her family.<sup>58</sup>

Furthermore, this was the stage when the girls (both peasant and gentry) began to experience a more and more confined and withdrawn life. They were withdrawn

from contact with outsiders. However,

"the peasant yü-nien girls were less withdrawn from outside contact than were the gentry yü-nien girls. This difference in the treatment was largely a function of the difference in living standards."<sup>59</sup>

Girls and women of the gentry families would be able to have servants doing work for them, thus confining and limiting their contacts with the outside world, including local shopkeepers and peddlers. By contrast, girls and women of the peasant families had relatively more contact with the outside world as well as with men doing their house-hold work.<sup>60</sup>

Unlike girls, boys at the Yü-nien Shih-Ch'i were not confined and restrained at all. Rather, their non-family contacts broadened greatly during this period of development. It was particularly the case in the gentry families. This was the period when gentry boys began to go to schools. Though it marked the beginning of severe physical and intellectual disciplines for them, it was also the period when these boys could and were able to form some firm associations with outsiders. Also during such stage, boys were not so often sold or killed during hard times as female babies would ever be.

Despite the chance of schooling, a female child at yü-nien shih-ch'i in the peasant family learnt to adjust herself to a life dominated by a definitely structured hierarchy of authority. Her daily activity was marked by

absolute obedience to the senior members of the family. She experienced that her place was secondary to male children of her same age. Indeed, "the spirit of independence and self-assertion in the young people was not fostered, especially in girls."<sup>61</sup> Through the differentiated socialization practices, girls learned that they should be submissive to their brothers. It is also noteworthy that,

"the girl at this age group remained under the supervision and direction of her mother. Her training took the form of preparation for the role she would assume in the future as a wife and mother."<sup>62</sup>

However, in some gentry families, an intelligent girl at this stage frequently began to gain indulgence. She could even become a favourite of her father. It was thus not surprising to find such a girl sometimes being able to be personally instructed in the art of reading the classics by her father. She might even be able to enjoy the chance of being tutored by private tutors. This was, however, a rare phenomenon. Generally, boys were chosen to be educated rather than girls even when the family was rich enough to afford education for the children.<sup>63</sup>

By and large, yü-nien shih-ch'i was the period during which girls remained under their mothers' care and were trained for their future roles as wives and mothers.<sup>64</sup> There was a great difference in the treatments experienced by the peasant girls and the gentry girls. The gentry

yü-nien girls though were more physically confined, they were more likely to be educated than the peasant yü-nien girls. Among the poor peasant families, girls had to face the destiny of being sold out as child-brides. Though taking child-brides was a minor form of marriage, it was common in the rural areas in China. Whether as a child-bride, or as an adult-bride, a woman's place in her husband's home was far different from that in her parental family.

"Although a daughter was not formally valued as a permanent member of the parental family, actually her position there was cushioned by bonds of natural affection and indulgence."<sup>65</sup>

As children approached the next stage of development or next age group, the differential situations faced by girls and boys became more distinct. This stage is called ching-nien stage or ching-nien shih-ch'i which generally covered the years between sixteen or seventeen and thirty for males, and started and ended somewhat earlier in the case of female in traditional China.<sup>66</sup>

The male at ching-nien stage was relatively free from great strains as compared with his yü-nien stage, for parental discipline was then considerably slackened. This gave the male ching-nien "more autonomy of action than he had ever had before."<sup>67</sup> It is thus not surprising to find that the ching-nien period was generally a period in which a male ching-nien began to take up heterosexual experience either through prostitution or through sexual relations with the servant girls.



In addition, it was the time that a male ching-nien in traditional China could easily get involved in gambling. These activities were mostly disruptive to the accepted family pattern. In order to alleviate or avoid these, the parents of a male ching-nien were often anxious to procure a wife for their boy for the sake of family's stability. In such a way, these parents could at least be able to see the boy safely married and assumed a more stable role in the family.<sup>68</sup>

At this point, it is noteworthy that

"the factor of marriage was a major one in the life of ching-nien boy. He did not however, play any prominent role in the decision. His wife was chosen for him by his parents."<sup>69</sup>

In selecting the mate for him, it was usually his mother who played a major role though the father assumed a supervisory role and had the right to alter any decision. However, the father usually did not perform his role very energetically. Thus, although women did not have right over their own marriages, they had control over their sons' marriages. That could be seen as an area of female power. Perhaps sometimes the son's opinions might be asked, but this would have been rare in traditional Chinese families. At least in this aspect, there was a glimpse of equality between the sexes, the young of both sexes were equally powerless to affect the decision. Yet marriage was a greater turning point in the life of the female ching-nien than the male ching-nien. In fact, this term "ching-nien"

in traditional Chinese society was not generally applied to girls at all, the stages of the life cycle being differently marked for each sex. It was perhaps because of the fact that

"marriages for girls in 'traditional' China took place at an earlier age. (Indeed), the average girl married at the age from one to several years younger than that generally accepted for the male of her own class, this tended to cancel the period which ching-nien covered."<sup>70</sup>

The absence of a clear-cut break between the yü-nien stage and ching-nien stage was even more obvious among the peasant girls than among the rich. The passage from yü-nien stage was not marked by any significant change. By the advent of the most dramatic physical development of the female yü-nien stage, i.e. the advent of the menstrual period, girls had long been segregated from males of their own families and those males of the other families.

A girl approaching the end of the yü-nien period was "gradually taught the skills and duties appropriate to women of her status." She was not assigned any new responsibility of her parental family, but was destined to be married out of the family.<sup>71</sup>

#### As Child-Brides

Another evidence of the low traditional status of the Chinese women was their position in relation to the institution of marriage. Marriages taking place in traditional Chinese society were arranged by parents. Such arranged marriages always bore a strong element of purchase

which could further strengthen the authority of the husband's family over the married woman.<sup>72</sup>

There was a form of marriage constituting a source of grievance to many girls: the future daughter-in-law was adopted as a small child to be raised in her in-law's house until she was old enough to be married and became the daughter-in-law. This was a very common practice in the rural areas of China.

Arthur Wolf argues that this kind of marriage was confined mainly to the poor. This is because most young men from the poor families could not afford the expensive ceremonies for the major traditional and orthodox marriage. This practice made great economies in the marriage ceremonies possible. This arrangement could help spread "the cost of bringing the child up which was the responsibility of in-laws ..."<sup>73</sup> Thus, it could be economically advantageous to poor families in getting wives for their sons, as well as in avoiding the costs of raising a daughter.

Such marriage was a source of grievance to the girls who were separated from their families at an early age. Their lives inside the adopting (future husband's) family were usually harsh to them under desperate pressures of poor economic reality. The adoptive parents always treated these adopted child-brides more ruthlessly than their own children. It was also not uncommon that a child-bride was resold to other families or into prostitution if her parents-in-law

could not afford raising her any longer or had second thoughts about their choice.

Perhaps poverty was not the only reason for a peasant family to get child-brides for the sons. It might also be because of the shortage of marriageable girls as a result of the presences of concubinage, prostitution, infanticide as well as other professions like acting, dancing that drew girls out of the marriage market.<sup>74</sup>

It is noteworthy that in so far as all marriages were arranged and were considered as contracts between families rather than the individuals involved, child-brides were simply a further extension of this idea.

In one aspect, the child-bride was a little bit better off than the bride married as a more mature girl. In the latter practice the marrying girl had to make a sharp and abrupt adaptation to live with a man and his family whom she had never met before. However, a girl adopted as a child-bride could have a long and gradual period to adapt to the family and community in which she would live her adult life.

In another aspect, however, a child-bride had to face many more difficulties. The loss of her membership in her parental family at such a young age was really harsh to her. She had to be totally subservient to the wishes of her new family. Even her name was changed and she came

to be addressed by a term denoting her position in her new family. Indeed, usually

"she was the last to eat and ate the most inferior food ... She was beaten at will by her husband and other members of the family. Most of all, she was a slave to her mother-in-law ..." <sup>75</sup>

#### AFTER MARRIAGE

##### As a Daughter-in-law

As with a male ching-nien, marriage for a girl in traditional Chinese society was fully arranged by parents. This might largely be owing to the cultural conception of the goal of marriage prevailing at that time which stressed that it was "not personal satisfaction but the continuation of the family, of the 'stream of life'" that was important. Thus, people were not taught to expect happiness and love from marriage. Consequently, marriage was taken as a family affair among the Chinese in the past. It was mainly an important concern of the families and clans and less significant as a concern of bride and groom.

"Marriage was a contract between families and clans and the suitability of a bride or groom was not a matter for the family elders to decide. While a marriage was officially arranged by a professional match-maker, the reach for a suitable mate could be initiated by the parents of either the male or the female child." <sup>76</sup>

The primary goal of marriage in traditional China was to produce male-offspring, so as to ensure the continuation of the patrilineal family line. It is thus

not surprising to see that "the logic of the whole social system in which marriages were made (stressed) the interests of the family as a whole, rather than (the) love or attraction between the couple."<sup>77</sup> Moreover, daughters of the rich families were married off with a substantial dowry and, the bride-price offered by the rich groom was also considerable. The dowry and trousseau were often put on open display.<sup>78</sup> These large-scale transactions accompanying marriage increased the sense in which adults, more than the young, were involved.

It was generally the bride price that "gave those who paid it very wide and continuous control over women."<sup>79</sup> It should be noted that in arranging the marriage for their children, the parents were very much concerned with conventional intra-class considerations as "matching a bamboo door with a bamboo door and a wooden door with a wooden door."<sup>80</sup> If families were not equal in status, hypergamy was likely to occur. Thus status of the bride's family was unlikely ever to be higher than that of the husband's family, this probably helped ensure her subordination.

It is noteworthy that as Yang has said, "the form of marriage had a profound effect upon the arrangement of the

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\*The word "door" in the Chinese context carries the meaning of the prestige and status of a family.

status of the family members."<sup>81</sup> Since the brides entered their husbands' families under the arranged marriage in which they were, like commodities, transacted from one family to another, not surprisingly their statuses were low.

By and large, for the girls, marriage constituted a dramatic break in their lives. At least it was, and still is, a common custom that upon marriage, girls leave their parental households and live thereafter in their husbands' households. This was inevitably a sharp break from childhood and youth, since "most of them had seldom if ever left their own courtyards, thus separation was all the more acute."<sup>82</sup> If their husbands' households were far from their parental households, girls married out might rarely see their own parents again. Thus,

"it was almost inevitable that the first few months of marriage were complicated for young wives by loneliness and homesickness."<sup>83</sup>

Moreover, such a hardship associated with marriage was further complicated by the fact that the mates were chosen for them. Their feeling and desires were largely irrelevant, and love matches were out of the question. This transition was symbolized by the bride's dropping her personal name and taking on her husband's surname.<sup>84</sup> A married woman (newly married bride) was

"not given the customary name that indicated the generation to which (she) belonged in (her) own (family) but acquired the name of her husband's generation."<sup>85</sup>

Marriage was the watershed marking the on-set of the severest discipline for women to face.<sup>86</sup> It was perhaps directly attributable to the goal of marriage which took it as an institution for perpetuating the family organization. The importance of the kin-based relationship was emphasized in marriage rituals that stressed the continuity of the family and made the new couple feel that

"their marriage was only a part of the complex family institution, dramatized for them the importance of the ancestors and the family, dwarfed their own roles as individuals, and demonstrated to them that marriage was a link in the cycle of critical events of the family."<sup>87</sup>

The homage to the ancestors in the marriage ceremonies marked the beginning of a period of ritual services to the husband's family. It also marked the admission of the bride, as an outsider, to become an effectively functional member of her new family.<sup>88</sup> However, once girls got married, they were excluded from ancestral rites both in their families of orientation and their husbands' families.<sup>89</sup> Thus, the subordination of women to men in the family contexts was further enhanced and perpetuated.

For the young husband, the new life after marriage was not much changed. At least he was staying in his own household where he could live as it was before his marriage. Like his wife, he had also to be subordinate to his elders, who assumed the right to make all major



decisions concerning the welfare of him and his wife.

But the wife's situation was a completely uneasy one. She had to face the complete loneliness and homesickness of being separated from her intimate circle. She entered a new household as a stranger, had no authority and privilege, and was obliged to serve and please her mother-in-law. She had also to adjust herself to the hierarchy among the in-laws. Though "young bride usually assumed a traditionally determined share of the duties of the household ..." <sup>90</sup>, in no way could a young bride assume any independent role in making decisions.

If the family was not rich the new bride was always assigned great chores of household work. In a rich family, a new bride could have servants doing most of the work. Generally, she had to subordinate not only to all the senior members of the family, but she might also find herself being dominated by even the younger junior members of the new family.

More noteworthy were the situations that a new bride had to face, in regard to her interactions with her mother-in-law. She was sometimes regarded as endangering the balance within the family and disrupting the most sacred relationship between parents and son. The mother-in-law was particularly careful in guarding against this. Not surprisingly, tradition had held that the daughter-in-law was to owe complete obedience to her parents-in-law; but

it was given mostly to the mother-in-law.

A young bride's relationship with her mother-in-law was seldom harmonious, but was characterized by many daily frictions between them. These frictions came mostly from the sexual division of labour within the family which always assigned the mother-in-law as the bride's forewoman and work-mate.<sup>91</sup> The daily life of the new bride was not only insulated but confined to the family. Perhaps women married to poorer families were not as much confined for they had to take active parts in work like washing clothes by the riverside, fetching water and working in the fields at busy times of the year. Owing to economic necessity, women married into low socio-economic class families had greater say in the family affairs and were less dominated by the hierarchy of family elders. It also enabled these women to have more social contacts outside the family. Yet their roles were still secondary to male elders.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, they were so overloaded with the work chores that "all day long, (they moved) between three terraces: the k'ang (the bed), the kitchen stove, and the millstone."<sup>93</sup>

Moreover, in conflict between brides and mothers-in-law, husbands tended to side with their mothers for the sake of filial piety which was regarded as important inside the traditional Chinese families. Consequently, their mothers could exploit this advantage to treat their daughters-in-law harshly. It was perhaps because they wanted to avenge

the torments they had suffered while they were themselves daughters-in-law. Not surprisingly, it has long been held that being a daughter-in-law was usually the time when "all miseries of womanhood began."<sup>94</sup>

Vivid pictures of the harshness of mother-in-law were commonly used as main themes in Chinese literature and folklore. The harshness was comparable to that of the formidable stepmother of western fairy tales.

The harsh treatments experienced by daughters-in-law in their husbands' families are manifested vividly through reports on Liu Ling village by Jan Myrdal. All through the section of his reports on women in Liu Ling village, most women acknowledge that they have had hard lives. Nearly all of them wept when talking about the ill-treatments they have experienced from their mothers-in-law.<sup>95</sup>

Apart from interactions with mother-in-law, a new bride was constantly on trial in her husband's family. She had to compete with other daughters-in-law and be judged on her adequacy as a daughter-in-law. Perhaps the resentments from other members of her husband's family stemmed from the huge bride-price that the family had paid in acquiring her.

Faced with an unhappy marriage, a woman could not easily initiate a divorce. The

"grounds for divorce initiated by the wife were so stringent and the social disgrace and isolation for a divorced woman so serious a problem as to make divorce practically impossible."<sup>96</sup>

As far as the marriage rules governing divorce are concerned, they came into practice after T'ang dynasty. These rules evolved from the rules of social conduct originally contained in Li Chi.<sup>97</sup> According to those rules, a wife could be divorced by her husband on any of the following seven grounds or reasons. They are:

- "1. disobedience of her husband's parents, 2. failure to bear children, 3. adultery, 4. jealousy, 5. loathsome disease, 6. garrulousness, 7. theft."<sup>98</sup>

On the other hand, rules did exist to protect a woman from being divorced by her husband. But there were only three. They were:

- "1. if she had for three years mourned her husband's parents; 2. if the family had become wealthy; and 3. if she had no family to receive her back."<sup>99</sup>

However, it is noteworthy that the wife could seldom initiate any divorce without the mutual consent of both families who had arranged the marriage. On the other hand, it was frequent that the husband exercised his rights to divorce his wife without securing her consent. At this point, it is noteworthy that a divorced man could have the right to incorporate concubines. Thus, divorce did not constitute any great harm to his family life.

But a divorce was particularly tragic for a woman. She could have no other places to go besides her natal family. However, going home after divorce did bring shame or disgrace to her family as well as to herself. Indeed, "a divorced woman was subject to a great deal of social sanction and would lead an extremely ostracized life there-

after."<sup>100</sup> Thus, a woman would never, in practice, willingly agree to divorce.

Furthermore, it is a matter of fact that she could not inherit any property nor could she possess any part from her dowry. Thus she could have no chance or source of financial support after divorce and in addition to this bad situation a "double standard of morality" further denied the chance for a divorced woman to remarry.

#### As a Concubine

As aforementioned, unlike their wives, most husbands were free to seek sexual satisfaction through concubinage and prostitution. As concubines, women were mainly taken as supplementary tools of procreation. Concubinage was socially sanctioned in traditional Chinese society, in part as a way of assuring male descendants.

It was an obligation to have sons in order to ensure that ancestor worship could be maintained. However, it is noteworthy that the concubines incorporated

"were not full members of the family although they were members of the households. Their position was inferior to that of wives and they could be abused by them as well as exploited by their masters ..."<sup>101</sup>

Besides, a concubine was not entitled to have any legal share of the family income. She was assigned to do all the manual household work supervised by the legal wife, and was not seen as a relative to her husband's family. This was shown through the fact that she was generally

excluded from mourning deceased family members, and she herself could never be worshipped as an ancestor. Her own children, though legitimate, had only restricted inheritance rights unless the legal wife did not have sons.<sup>102</sup>

However, it is noteworthy that some concubines might be treated better than the wives if they were the objects of romantic interest by the male family heads. Thus, it is true that, "the fate of the concubines depended on many individual factors."<sup>103</sup>

Since the institution of concubinage constituted an alternative avenue to love and sexual satisfaction, it symbolized "the men's freedom through domination."<sup>104</sup> As Leslie has said, "concubines ... were likely to be women of (the male family head's) own choosing with whom the relationship was romantic and erotic."<sup>105</sup> Thus the male, if he could afford it, had some compensation for the fact of arranged marriage.

Concubinage could help men drain off their emotional stresses; prostitution might perhaps have the same function too. Large scale prostitution did exist in traditional China. Through prostitution men could seek satisfaction for desires "that might otherwise have threatened the stability of the family system."<sup>106</sup> Yet it constituted another source of degradation to those unlucky women or girls who were forced into this "occupation".

As far as the love and sexual satisfaction through

concubinage was concerned, it was widely practised among the gentry. Such practice was rather uncommon among the peasantry.

It is not surprising that men from the upper and middle classes who were able to afford it took concubines. Generally, a wife in such families was not expected to show any resentment when her husband took a concubine, for, "in all circumstances the legal wife maintained her position."<sup>107</sup> The concubine was supposed to avoid quarrels with the legal wife and submitted to her greater authority. So, as concubines, these women had to adjust to even more difficult situations than those faced by the legal wives in the family contexts.

From a legal wife's point of view, however, even if her formal position in the family was not affected by the concubine, the institution of concubinage could pose a more subtle threat to her by arousing her jealousy.. This was particularly the case for legal wives of the upper and middle classes.<sup>168</sup> Indeed, concubines were often taken into these rich families because their legal wives could not bear a male heir. Once the concubine gave birth to a male heir, the attitudes of the family toward the legal wife might be worsened. Thus concubinage was somehow an institution that furthered the difficult situations for women of both classes in traditional Chinese society.

### Entering Motherhood

Just because of the great importance attached to having male descendants, it is not surprising that a woman bearing a child would experience some good treatment. It was usually the mothers-in-law who changed their treatments toward their daughters-in-law, hoping that the child borne would be a male heir. This also reflects the influence of Confucianism that stressed child-bearing as a fulfillment of the collective obligation of the husband and wife.<sup>109</sup>

It is noteworthy that in traditional Chinese society, when women reached child-bearing time, they might enjoy an improvement of their status in their husbands' families. The child-bearing and rearing periods often lasted from the first year of marriage to the chung-nien period (i.e. around 45). A married woman would become more fortunate only if she could give birth to a male child as soon as possible after marriage.

"A woman's power became greatly heightened and her position much more secure after the birth of a child, particularly a male child."<sup>110</sup>

She could enjoy increasing authority as years passed. Such authority was mainly manifested through her rights to make major decisions for the family. It was also manifested through her (almost absolute) right to choose the mates for her grown-up sons and daughters.

No wonder Olga Lang can also give such an idea:

"When a woman grew older she enjoyed certain advantages



following from the subordination of the young to the old. The old mother and grandmother were greatly respected."<sup>111</sup>

However, it is worth-noting that no matter how much respect a woman could command over her son, her power was never completely equal to that of any senior male member in the family.

These ideas are further agreed upon by Delia Davin who holds that motherhood could give a woman (in traditional Chinese society) a chance to end the roughest stage in her life, provided that she gave birth to a son, not a girl. However, that woman would still be subordinate to the surviving old mother-in-law, as well as the old surviving senior males.<sup>112</sup>

If, however, a married woman could not give birth to a boy but a girl, motherhood would not be an alleviating or less burdensome phase for that woman. Instead,

"without a male child her position as wife could be jeopardized by the family's decision to bring in a secondary wife or concubine, justified in traditional times in the interest of continuity of the male line."<sup>113</sup>

From another point of view, motherhood constituted a crisis to Chinese women in traditional time. It can be viewed as another source of inequality that women in traditional China had to suffer from.

Apart from the problems which arose from child-birth, women entering motherhood had to face problems of adjustment in regard to difficulties in child-rearing. Indeed, child-bearing problems would often add burdens to the already

difficult adjustments-- in the relationships between the wife and her mother-in-law.

Further complicated was the high value placed on having as many children as desirable. Thus, the married women (particularly in big traditional families) were often confined by the frequent pregnancies. The intervals between one pregnancy and the next was usually short.<sup>114</sup> Consequently, these women were greatly exhausted by reiterated child-bearing. Indeed,

"death in child birth of both mother and child was frequent, to say nothing of the debilitating effect on those who survived. Certainly such an arduous physical experience so often repeated must have greatly increased the general discomfort of women."<sup>115</sup>

At this point, we should note that there were great differences in situations encountered by gentry wives and those by the peasant wives in this respect. By and large, gentry wives could have better situations than those of the peasant women. At least the gentry women did not have to bear so heavy a burden as the peasant women had to bear because the gentry women could have servants at their disposal while the peasant women could not. Also, concubines might have relieved the gentry women of some child-bearing duties.

Furthermore, the sanitation and nutrition in the peasant households were even worse than that in the gentry households; even though the latter were still appalling as compared with the modern standards. Thus, it is not

surprising that the chances of their children surviving to reach maturity were far less than those of the gentry class. Consequently, in order to fulfill the expectation of having as many children as desirable, peasant wives were more often the victims of frequent pregnancies.<sup>116</sup>

Thus, it is not very correct to say that the child-bearing phase of family life was a rewarding phase for women in traditional Chinese society. Indeed, how rewarding that was, depended almost entirely on economic factors.<sup>117</sup>

All in all, child-bearing was regarded as "the source of happiness" both to the couple as well as to the husband's family. This was particularly the case of the first pregnancy after a woman's marriage.

"If her child were a son, her status was immensely improved. A wife who had borne a son had gone a long way toward her complete incorporation in the family for she had produced the means of its continuance."<sup>118</sup>

#### Women at Old Age or in Widowhood

With advance in age, women became members of another age group. The period of lao-nien (from 55 years of age and over) was perhaps the only period in life that women in traditional China could enjoy a status with a lack of strain. This was the consequence of quite a few factors.

Firstly, it was the time when the women had become accustomed to their roles as married women in their husbands' families. Furthermore, this might be the time when their mothers-in-law were either dead or retired. Thus they were released from major dominations. This might

also be the time when their husbands were also dead; hence their subordinate role was further improving.

Moreover, while approaching older age, a married woman was released from the child-bearing duty. The hard work of child-rearing was either over or taken over by her older children. She was no longer a stranger or an outsider to the family anymore.<sup>119</sup>

Most important of all, she could experience a drastic change in her status within the family sphere. Being a widow (released from male-domination), and with the passing away of the mother-in-law, she was then able to take up the place as the effective head of, at least, the female hierarchy of the family as the mother-in-law of her sons' wives.<sup>120</sup> No wonder Levy and Leslie have the same feeling that the lao-nien stage was an unusual stage for women in the sense that women at that stage were most likely released from both male-domination and from the domination of their mothers-in-law.<sup>121</sup>

Once again, it is noteworthy that there were differences in situations faced by lao-nien women in the gentry families and those in the peasantry. "The lao-nien stage was an unusual one for women." This was only evident in gentry families. In these families,

"they were pampered with all the comforts of life that were available. The best food and clothings were theirs. They had the admiring recognition of their families ... (But) among the peasants the lot of lao-nien was not so good as among the gentry."<sup>122</sup>

However, it is generally true that as a widow, a woman could expect to enjoy the devotion of her children as compensation for her earlier hard life. Yet,

"for all the devotion of the son to his mother, her female inferiority prevented her from dominating him as his father did, and the law urging the woman to obey her son after his father's death was never abrogated.<sup>123</sup> the real power lay in the hands of her son."

Thus, a widow might effectively control all affairs of a large household. But, rules and social values still subjected her to domination of men. Technically, a widow was still subordinate to her oldest son.<sup>124</sup>

These remaining roots of subordination were also attributable to the influences of Confucian ethics of "Three Obediences and Four Virtues" which stressed that a woman who becomes a widow shall obey her oldest son.

Apart from the aspect of subordination, women entering widowhood while they were still young had additional difficulties since the remarriage of young widows was often frowned upon. "The only way a widow could retain a position of honor was to stay as the mother in the home of her son."<sup>125</sup> Remarriage of a widow was taken as a social disgrace. So, it was really rare to see the remarriage of gentry widows.<sup>126</sup>

However, among the poor, there were remarriages in practice. This practice was mainly because of economic reasons. It was not uncommon to find poor boys marrying

widows for "the widows and their families would settle for a much lower bride price."<sup>127</sup> This is evidently stressed by Delia Davin that remarriages of widows, although abhorrent to Confucian ethics, was a normal practice among the peasantry, particularly when the widows were still quite young.<sup>128</sup>

Moreover, it was also because of the existence of the "double sex standard" in traditional Chinese society that widows lost face if they remarried.

"The double sex standard ... demanded not only that a woman should be a virgin when she was married or that she should remain faithful to her husband after marriage, but also that she should be a chaste widow after her husband's death."<sup>129</sup>

In order to conform to the standard of chastity, some cruel practices were tried by some women. For example,

"women who believed that they had been 'defiled' by men other than their lawful husbands might commit suicide by dismembering themselves, and others engaged in the absurd practice of marrying the spirit of their dead betrothed."<sup>130</sup>

The latter practice took place when a girl was betrothed to a man, and the man died before the wedding was held. In order to conform to the standard of chastity and to save face for both families involved, the full wedding ceremonies were still carried out. "The bride went through all ceremonies next to a wooden tablet with the dead man's name and dates of birth and death written on it."<sup>131</sup> Thereafter, the "virgin widow" was to stay chaste in her deceased husband's house for the rest of her life. This was also

the effect of Confucian ethics. Not surprisingly, a name of "man-eating religion" was put to Confucianism by most Chinese scholars during the new cultural movement of 1917 in China.<sup>132</sup>

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ECONOMIC STATUS OF GIRLS' AND WOMEN IN TRADITIONAL CHINESE SOCIETY

It is time to look at the overall economic status of women and girls in traditional China. While analyzing this issue, it is particularly relevant to look again at the marriage rules governing women's and girls' inheritance of property and estate.

It is noteworthy that in traditional China, the family system placed all the family property as well as income earned by all family members under the control of the family head. As has been mentioned before, the traditional Chinese family was patrilocal and patriarchal in nature;<sup>133</sup> it is not surprising to find that women in traditional China had no property rights, at least in a practical sense.

This lack of property-ownership was evident at the time when a family estate was divided. All the males could have at least a share (however small) of the family estate. Yet, female members could rarely get any share, except in rare cases where no surviving male relative was left in the clan.<sup>134</sup> The clear-cut age and sex differentiations of the traditional Chinese family not only applied to the division of labour, but were also evident in property-ownership and management of income.



"The right of property management belonged to the family's economic organization, the head of the house also dictated the inheritance."<sup>135</sup>

In the Southwestern provinces of China, the female inheritance rights were even restricted by a strict rule forbidding widows to inherit any property or estate from their late husbands.

"A woman might own family property on the death of her husband, but she could not dispose of it without consent of the son if she had male children."<sup>136</sup>

Furthermore, Maurice Freedman has found that in the southern provinces of China (e.g. Fukien and Kwangtung) once a woman got married, she had no right to make any further economic claims on her natal family.

"(Her) economic interests (were) concentrated on what she (had) brought with her and the rights of her husband."<sup>137</sup>

Indeed, "after the completion of marriage exchanges no property flowed by right between the married woman's old family and her new family." This further assured that a woman married out was cut off from any rights to inherit any property or estate from her natal family.<sup>138</sup>

Apart from the legal rights of inheritance, the overall economic status of women and girls in traditional China was a vivid manifestation of their inferiority, both at home and in society. Without legal status in property-ownership and property inheritance, women were totally economically dependent upon their husbands. This was perhaps the consequence of early socialization as well as

the later confinement of girls and women for they were supposed to have little contact with the world outside the family. The chance for them to work for independent financial support was very limited.

Even though peasant women often laboured outside their households, such labour did not give them any independent income or financial control. Indeed, "roles open to women in the 'traditional' family were to an extraordinary degree controlled by men of their own family."<sup>139</sup>

Furthermore, the most common non-household work that women often engaged in were domestic industries like handicraft-making and embroidery. These types of industries offered no permanent or secure chance of employment for women. Thus, women engaging in these types of employment still had very weak or subordinate economic roles. The working conditions were poor too. By and large, they were economically subordinate or economically dependent on men.<sup>140</sup>

There is still another noteworthy reason for women in traditional China to be in an economically subordinate role. That is their lack of education. Early in their childhood, girls had already lacked the chances of being educated, despite those exceptional cases where girls could be taught by private tutors. As a matter of fact, during the pre-Liberation period, education was for the few and the rich. In the old society most young people had to work and had no time and no money to pay for such expenses.

Generally speaking, only the sons of officials, landlords, and merchants could receive an education. Their daughters had almost no opportunity to study.<sup>141</sup>

Moreover, the educational organizations in traditional Chinese society were overwhelmingly dominated by the Confucian doctrine of male-supremacy. Thus women could hardly get educated. These mostly illiterate women could hardly develop any practical skill outside of their homes and consequently remained dependent economically on their husbands and their in-laws.<sup>142</sup>

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

After examining the status of women in traditional China in great detail, it is time to draw a conclusion at this point. It is now safe to conclude that despite minor exceptional cases, the overall status of women in traditional China was considerably low and degrading.

The focal point of my analyses has been centered on the family. Indeed, families have been the basic functional social units in Chinese society. Since the general status of women in the family was low in traditional China, it was rather impossible to have a high status granted to women at the societal level.

It was apparently the Confucian ethics of "male-supremacy" and the patriarchal and patrilineal family structure that overwhelmingly dominated the traditional Chinese social structures. These consequently constituted the basic causes of the low status of women in traditional China.

From another point of view, the low status of women in traditional Chinese society had much to do with the mode of production prevailing in China at that time. As a matter of fact, China has basically been an agricultural country.

And agricultural adaptation is characterized by decreased spatial mobility for females. Like many other agricultural countries, China also has highly valued the life-long restriction of women to the physical confines of the domicile.<sup>143</sup> According to the history of cultural evolution, under the agricultural model of production, the division of labour assigns men as the providers, while the share of women becomes domestic.<sup>144</sup> So it is quite safe to attribute the low status of women in traditional China to these resulting biased and stereotyped role-conceptions among the sexes.<sup>145</sup> Perhaps Martin and Voorhies are right in arguing that,

"with the innovation and the spread of intensive cultivation techniques, ... women dropped out of the main stream of production for the first time in the history of cultural evolution."<sup>146</sup>

It is probably because of this that women in rural agricultural contexts had less chance to enjoy the sexual equality than their sisters in the shifting cultivation contexts could enjoy. However, it does not mean that women in a more industrialized and urbanized setting cannot enjoy greater sexual equality. In fact, it was the great need for labour power that gave women a greater chance to attain sex-equality with men in post-revolutionary Chinese society -- which I am now going to touch upon.

## CHAPTER VI

### EARLY WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS ORGANIZED BY THE KUOMINTANG (KMT) AND THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY (CCP)

#### WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS UNDER THE SPONSORSHIP OF THE KUOMINTANG (KMT)

The women's movement in China did not emerge just in the event of the Communist Revolution. In fact, it has a long and remarkable record. Women's participation in revolution began way back as early as the Taiping Rebellion in 1850, the 1898 Hundred Day Reform and the subsequent 1911 revolutionary activities.<sup>147</sup> All these historical events show that early before the Communist regime was established, women had participated in politics in China and had demanded greater sex-equality.

It is noteworthy that with the impact of western ideas of bourgeois democracy, the idea of female equality was preached by two early prominent male reformers: Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and K'an Yu-wei in the late 1800's. Their examples were followed by many independent women leaders. One of these leaders was the remarkable and devoted women's rights advocate, Ch'iu Chin. She was one of the early Chinese female radicals in the early 1900's -- the one who established

China's first feminist newspaper in 1909.<sup>148</sup>

As a matter of fact, the 1911 bourgeois revolution -- fathered by Sun Yat-sen -- had stimulated the idea of organizing a women's movement. That revolution stressed the rights for women to have equal participation in revolution with men.<sup>149</sup> Besides, it had planted the seeds for later ideology that subsequently helped weaken the traditional dominance of the family in social and political spheres.<sup>150</sup> Along with the impact of western imperialism, christianity, liberal democracy, pragmatism, anarchism and communism also inspired the rebellious Chinese. The most rebellious sector was the youths. They were inspired to rebel against the Confucian family pattern. Thus they became the organic ally of the women's movement.

The very incipient stage of the Chinese feminist movements dates back to 1912 -- the time when the bourgeois Republic was established. This Republic was the product of the bourgeois revolution in 1911. This revolution had already included the emancipation of women as one of its elements.<sup>151</sup> It was at that time women in China were

"deeply influenced by western suffragettes, but coloured as well by the fight against a feudal patriarchal society, this movement calls itself 'niguan yudong' -- 'women's right movement' -- or 'canzheng yudong', 'suffrage movement'."<sup>152</sup>

The post-revolutionary phase was marked by the formation of many women's organizations demanding political rights. Even men helped strive for women's rights. During

the period of 15 years (1900 - 1914), the women's liberation was taken by men as an integral part in the liberation of the country from the Manchus' rule. Perhaps because the Manchus had perpetuated all the degrading practices, e.g. concubines and prostitution, the attack on the degradation of women could be seen as equivalent to an attack on part of the Manchus' culture.

Meanwhile, the western ideas of humanity stimulated women to protest against the inhumane working conditions for women workers. Many women's organizations came into being for this purpose.<sup>153</sup> Indeed, the working conditions were generally poor. For example, in a cotton factory (as in some other textile factories) women workers always had to go to work early in the morning while the city was asleep just to get enough to eat. They could not return home until late at night. "(They) never saw the sky for months, and some never saw the sun for years."<sup>154</sup> Pay was poor and they also had to face the harsh treatment of the foremen.

Women's movements in China during the period from 1900 - 1914 can be divided into two phases: before and after the bourgeois revolution of 1911. The pre-revolutionary phase was mainly concerned with encouraging women to participate in revolution. Also there came the ideas of improving women's education and unbinding their feet. The main theme of the post-bourgeois revolution movement was to fight for sex-equality in terms of equal rights for men and women. However, no great success came forth in the first



attempt to demand equal suffrage rights through a petition to Sun Yat-sen. The second phase of the women's movement aimed at family reform. That came out through vigorous criticisms of the Confucian family.<sup>155</sup>

Furthermore, western ideas were introduced through journals and magazines. These stimulated Chinese women to review their situations and to demand improvements through social, cultural, and political reforms. Thus,

"the New Culture Movement or Renaissance which started in 1917, broke out in full scale in the May Fourth Movement of 1919\*<sup>156</sup>. In that movement of multiple significance the term 'family revolution' was introduced to the consciousness of the public."<sup>157</sup>

Such "family revolution" proceeded hand in hand with the youth movement and women's movement as the phases of the May Fourth Movement.<sup>158</sup> The "family revolution" embedded the demand for sex-equality for women in family and in society. Besides, it included demands for free marriage based on love; arranged marriage by parents was criticized. It also advocated a new western-patterned family institution.<sup>159</sup>

By and large, the women who engaged in these movements became the ally of the rebellious youths. Indeed,

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\*It is noteworthy, however, that the women's movement first appeared as an independent organized body in the temporary Girls' Patriotic Association. That was organized to protest against the unfair treaties of the foreign powers after World War I. The women's movement existed by then only as small scattered groups until it burst forth again later as more concerned with the freedom, equality and suffrage problems for the women.

"infused with western concepts of equality and competitiveness, advanced Chinese became bourgeois feminists." They began to fight for women's rights.<sup>160</sup> This sector of youths included many Chinese intellectuals like writers, educators, and statesmen. They became the foremost women's emancipation leaders.

Moreover, China was by then freshly influenced by Christianity. And more women were loyal to the Christian faith than men. Thus, the Y.W.C.A. could grow into a legitimate part of the women's emancipation movement.<sup>161</sup> It mounted merciless attacks on the traditional status of women. Meanwhile, most men educated abroad brought back the "western (concepts) of what an ideal (woman) should be."<sup>162</sup>

During the incipient stages, protests were unorganized and sporadic. However, there was a tendency for the whole movement to become revolutionary. Women's Freedom tended to be linked with the freedom of all the Chinese people.<sup>163</sup> Ordinary women concerned about women's issues mostly entered the labour organizations together with men to fight for their rights.

Later on, there were organizations particularly formed in the Nationalist territory to fight for women's rights. These women's sections of the Kuomintang were "under Mrs. Liao Chung Kai, the widow of a famous martyr of Canton Labour Movement ..."<sup>164</sup> Thus "the revolutionary

activities of both the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party in the 1920's carried the women's movement to new heights." It was through these activities that women could participate in politics, occupations as well as education which had never been open to them before.<sup>165</sup>

In addition to the "family revolution", the New Culture Movement marked the beginning of the rapid development in women's education and co-education.<sup>166</sup> It was further facilitated under the Nationalist regime through the promulgation of a new kinship law "which permitted marriage by free choice of partners conditioned upon parental approval."<sup>167</sup> Thus, for the first time in China, marriage as a social institution got legal recognition that paid attention to the importance of the young couple's own interests.

Furthermore, being influenced by the western ideas, people began to question the Confucian orthodoxy that molded the kinship values and family institution. It became fashionable for modern intellectuals to attack and criticize Confucianism.<sup>168</sup>

The real movement for women's emancipation was first initiated by women from middle and upper social classes and was restricted to demanding minor reforms. Later the Chinese Communists argued that "the emancipation of women can only come with a change in the social structure which frees men and women alike."<sup>169</sup> It was based on this aim that the

Chinese Communist Party was founded in 1921.<sup>170</sup> Shortly afterwards, a Woman's Emancipation Association was formed under the joint organization of the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang.<sup>171</sup>

As aforementioned, the feminist movement in pre-revolutionary China was an integral part of the so-called "family revolution". Meanwhile, western notions of sex-equality and of democratic family organization began not only to attract the attention of the Chinese intelligentsia but also the ordinary masses.<sup>172</sup>

Though the Nationalist Congresses repeatedly urged for reform in the family system, "it was not until 1931 that the new Civil Code was promulgated that legally altered the Chinese family system."<sup>173</sup> Under the emerging demands, the Nationalist government was forced to promulgate legislation to alter the traditional family. All the legislations promulgated emphasized greater sex-equality between men and women in the family context.<sup>174</sup>

It is noteworthy that the Civil Code of 1931 included provisions supporting sex-equality, particularly in regard to marriage and divorce, property rights and inheritance, etc. These were really radical and revolutionary in nature. Unfortunately the Civil Code remained little but a piece of paper for it was not enforced or publicized with great effort.

Meanwhile, the Chinese Communist Party promulgated

their own code concerning marriages. With these regulations: "marriage and divorce by mutual consent, free of charge; prohibition of tyrannous mothers-in-law, prostitution, infanticide, and footbinding; equal property rights" were guaranteed.<sup>175</sup> Indeed, early in the Soviet period (1927) the Chinese Communists had already advocated the monogamous idea<sup>176</sup> and the abolition of ancestral worship also lessened the male-supremacy notion in the family context.

As a matter of fact, the position of women had undergone many radical changes long before the Kuomintang promulgated their Civil Code. The most worth-noting change was the abolition of the foot-binding custom. In addition, one interesting reform was introduced through the 1930's New Life Movement. In that movement, the government provided "collective weddings" so as to deviate from traditional style of wedding.<sup>177</sup> Through collective weddings the married couples, particularly the new brides could be a bit freer from the control of the grooms' families since the wedding expenses were jointly borne by all couples participating in the same wedding. For traditionally, the heavy wedding expense contributed to the grooms' families' degradation of the new brides.

Other changes included the provision of educational opportunities for girls and women and the less-restriction to women's employment in professional work. These tended to be changes introduced not only to cities but all parts of

the countryside too.<sup>178</sup> However, such efforts were not carried out energetically enough. Meanwhile the wider feminist goals and organizational methods of the 1920's were ignored. Later the 1934 New Life Movement would signal a neo-Confucian revival supporting the patriarchal family and male-supremacy.<sup>179</sup>

In addition to the legislative reforms carried out by the nationalist government, there had already been quite a few nation-wide campaigns in the Republic time to improve women's status.<sup>180</sup> The most remarkable campaigns were run and organized under the direction of the Christians through many educational institutions. Among them, the Y.W.C.A. and the Y.M.C.A. had been in the front line of the leadership. Other important organizations existed after 1922, although by then a split occurred in the women's movement. The movement was divided into moderate and revolutionary wings. The former wing became identified with the bourgeoisie and the latter was identified with the communists.

These separated wings were respectively the Women's Suffrage Association and the Women's Rights League. The former worked for getting constitutional equality for women; the latter "in addition called for women to join the revolution, to overthrow the feudal warlords, and struggle for a democratic society."<sup>181</sup> Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the moderate wing was made up of educated women who aimed primarily at political rather than economic rights.

They usually employed the tactics of petitioning and demonstrations. The revolutionary wing was made up of factory women who aimed at demanding improvements in wages and working conditions etc. They usually took actions of sabotage, strike, and demonstrations.<sup>182</sup> Though through these campaigns women could attain freedom to receive education outside their homes, they were only successful to a limited extent. There were still more illiterate women than men. Women attended universities and colleges together with men, yet they were still a minority as compared with the number of men.<sup>183</sup> Nevertheless, with all such improvements, women could have new work opportunities. Even co-education began to spread. For those with lower socioeconomic background, these meant "their release for the industrial labour market and the weakening of male authority in the home."<sup>184</sup>

By and large, the period between 1914 and 1928 was a period of marked assault on the ideologies degrading the traditional status of women. The reformists' ideologies at this period were more concerned with the "humanization" of women than the preceeding period. This humanization included giving women economic independence, education and political participations. The Chinese Communists stressed that the factory women and the women peasants had to be mobilized in order to overthrow capitalism whose very structure was the root of women's subordination.<sup>185</sup> During the 1920's the

Kuomintang women's departments put effort to effect yet another turn "away from family and towards general political radicalism". This was also the effort exerted by the Chinese Communist Party women's departments throughout the twenties.<sup>186</sup>

#### WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS UNDER THE SPONSORSHIP OF THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY (CCP)

It is most noteworthy that the Communist China's women's movement came into being through the celebration of March 8, International Women's Day in 1924. That was a most revered event in which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) sponsored rallies throughout China. The most remarkable one was held in Canton. There women demonstrated, demanding to have more equal education as well as the abolition of polygamy.<sup>187</sup>

Perhaps the women in China themselves realized that the very structure of capitalism was the source of their oppression. It was particularly the case for the women workers. This kind of feeling was further fostered by the anti-feminist attack beginning to be mounted under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek after 1927.<sup>188</sup> Meanwhile the Chinese Communist movement came to be identified with the women's movement. Not surprisingly, Chiang thought "women's rights was an important symbol of the total social reform desired by the leftists."<sup>189</sup> From Chiang's point of



view, if the Chinese Communist movement could really integrate with the women's and youth's movements, it would weaken or endanger his rule. So, he attacked the feminist movement. Despite that, the women's movement kept on progressing. "Throughout the twenties, March 8 continued to be a focal point for mobilizing women." These celebrations did symbolically encourage the Chinese women.<sup>190</sup>

Such movements had strong appeal to women workers and women peasants. With women making up a significant part of the labour force, so the trade unions and peasant unions were organized for them under the directorship of the Chinese Communists.<sup>191</sup> Thus, the May Fourth Movement of 1925 marked the development of the Communist influence in the new women workers' movement.

"This new women workers' movement started simultaneously with the beginning of the general labour movement during the Puhai Railway strike in 1923. Its founder was Miss Hsiang Chiu Yü ... the first chief of the Women's Department of the Chinese Communist Party."<sup>192</sup>

That chief -- Miss Hsiang, took the labour movement as the only potential for feminist organization and struggle. Members of the labour organizations were considered to be willing to make sacrifices. She stressed more the need of "incorporating women into the party's labour movement than in developing a separate women's bureau."<sup>193</sup> This was based on her idea that "feminist rebellion was meaningless without general political resolution."<sup>194</sup>

That idea was particularly congruent with the

situations in China after 1925. It was then the Kuomintang had established its dictatorial rule under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek. He initiated purges with anti-feminist aspects. Many mass organizations were driven underground. This indirectly confirmed Hsing's analyses that the feminist movement required a wider basis of support.

Furthermore, the fact that the early movement had had difficulty in building mass support also confirmed Hsiang's vision that the feminist movement should be incorporated into other mass movements.

Meanwhile, there were various mass movements. The first remarkable kind of organizations involved the educated youths -- students who were the backbone of the early Communist Party. These student movements were organized by Hsiang Ching Yü together with three other prominent Communist women's leaders -- Ts'ai Ch'ang, Teng Ying Ch'ao and Yang Chi-hua.<sup>195</sup>

One noteworthy thing about the student movements is that "female activism in the movement was not what the party women would have hoped." It was assumed that student movements would have had strong appeal to girl students. In regard to the equality of education in the past, girls were more oppressed than boys. For long, educational institutions had been male-dominated. It was very difficult for a peasant youth to get an education, and even more so for a girl. That might be because girls were inexperienced in

organizing the cells of the New Student Society.<sup>196</sup> So the cells and activities were mainly organized and led by men. That might also be because of the small enrollment of girls in higher education.

"In 1922 it is estimated that only 6.32% of the students in non-missionary schools were girls; by 1931 the figure of 11.75% is given for girls in colleges and universities."<sup>197</sup>

Besides, another mass movement that had close relation with the Communist women's movement was the labour movement. At that time women constituted a significant proportion of the labour force. They were mainly employed in the light industries like spinning and weaving. Because these industries had been considered as traditional "women's work" and women were more willing to work for lower wages than men, they had been more easily exploited than men. It is evident in the poor working conditions that women had to face in the 1920's.

"They worked the same 12-hour day as did men but received much less pay -- sometimes only half as much as men were given for the same jobs. Some women received no wages."<sup>198</sup>

Seeing that kind of oppression, the Communists appreciated that the female labour force could be a fertile recruiting ground.<sup>199</sup>

Under the Communists' organization, women workers participated in many strikes. It marked the first high tide of 1922. Though most of these strikes ended up in failure, yet these at least showed the militancy of female

workers. The Communists continued to highly value the support of the workers throughout 1926 and 1927. During this period, two most prominent women organizers emerged. They were Ts'ai Ch'ang and Liu Chien-hsien. They succeeded in organizing a strike in early 1927 for the Shanghai silk workers in welcome of the Northern Expedition. They proved to be enthusiastic organizers. However they were threatened and were held back from progressing further by Chiang Kai-shek's "white terror" after his successful Northern Expedition in 1927.<sup>200</sup>

By and large, the Communists' efforts in organizing feminist activities during the twenties had mainly been manifested in the labour movement. However, this was abandoned as the Party shifted from an urban strategy to the village strategy.

The peasant movement constituted another noteworthy mass movement that the Chinese Communists had merged with the women's movement. At the beginning of the peasant movement, women had already been involved. The peasant women were organized into different women's unions. In addition, a women peasants' movement was even officially sanctioned as a parallel to the women workers' movement.

The women's unions in such a movement were to take up the task of counselling women on problems concerning their marriages. They were to help defend the rights of women and take care of divorce issues. Fighting for the rights for the

peasant women to divorce, created problems.

"(If) the women's association did not grant a divorce, the wife would be dissatisfied and the organization would lose support; if it did, there would be problems with the overall peasants' union."<sup>201</sup>

As a matter of fact, it was hard for a peasant to find a wife. Thus, the Chinese Communists had to face a dilemma: to liberate women peasants, they might lose support from the male peasants.

Besides, the movement needed propagandists. This required training to be given to the propagandists. That in turn needed financial support. "Women simply did not control enough wealth to successfully support their movement."<sup>202</sup>

Furthermore, the peasant women's movement also had to confront two other problems. The first was the difficulty in overcoming the conservatism of the women in the villages. The other problem obstructing the movement was the conflict between the females and males within the whole peasant movement.

At this point, it is noteworthy that the peasant women's situations had a similarity with those of the girl students. That meant both were oppressed sexually despite their different economic circumstances. This was evident in the peasant women's enthusiasm in seeking divorce. Thus, they were not just struggling against the landlords but also against the men of their families. It was further justified by the fact that "even the most politically radical of fathers

generally retained his prerogatives as head of the household and decision maker for his women."<sup>203</sup>

By and large, there were quite a few problems that hindered the pace of the feminist movement in China during the twenties.

#### THE CHINESE COMMUNIST REVOLUTION AND EARLY WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENTS IN CHINA

As far as the relations between the Chinese Communist Revolution and the emancipation of Chinese women are concerned, there has been a definite connection between them. During the incipient stages of the Chinese Communist Revolution (i.e. prior to 1927), the Chinese Communists viewed women's liberation as an integral part of a socialist revolution. However, after 1927, that relation underwent a change. By then, the Stalinist leadership of the Chinese Communist Party tried energetically to subjugate women's movement to the party's task of running a socialist revolution.

"(T)he party under Stalinist leadership (even) often sought to limit the demands of women to enforcement of the democratic provision of the Kuomintang law code rather than going beyond them to full participation."<sup>204</sup>

Between 1917 and 1927 the Chinese Communist Party gave women considerable formal equality with men, i.e. granting free abortion on demand and restoring and reconstructing the marriage and divorce laws, etc. It was then that the party workers engaged in a Marxist analysis

of the oppression of women in China. Indeed, women's exclusion from productive labour helped them develop the orthodox Marxist analysis which seemed to fit the situations at that time.<sup>205</sup> Thus, it was emphasized that women's emancipation depended on their role in production and "that only through economic prosperity and independence can women start to gain liberation." Not surprisingly, the Communists linked the women's contribution to the family's income with their status in the family. The Chinese Communists argued that women's status in the family would rise as a result of their significant contribution to the family's income. Thus the importance of work for women has been stressed.<sup>206</sup> This is the reason that the Chinese Communists once acknowledged that only through the Chinese Communist Party's policies of massive mobilization could the Chinese women be liberated.<sup>207</sup> It was even obvious during the wartimes when extra-labour was needed to keep up production. Moreover, the women's organizations could be influential because their women members contributed significantly to production. However, women's family responsibilities limited the extent of their participation in production. Also, urban women found it difficult to find jobs. That was perhaps also the fundamental hinderance to the women's movement in the towns.<sup>208</sup>

Nevertheless, it was the Chinese Communist revolution that vastly improved Chinese women's status; its revolutionary ideology stressed that women should be liberated

in order to create a new society.<sup>209</sup> The Chinese Communists had already taken women's emancipation "as part of a spontaneous social movement (that) became incorporated into government policy." Also, they adapted the Marxist doctrine that deems it necessary to make every able-bodied person economically productive.<sup>210</sup> Indeed, Mao had been deeply influenced by this. He himself agreed that: "in order to build a great socialist society, it is of the utmost importance to arouse the broad masses of women to join in productive activities ..."<sup>211</sup> This is really congruent with the Marxist position.<sup>212</sup> It is not surprising at all because early in 1917-1927, Mao had already been openly concerned with the feminist movement. He saw it as a means to transform society by fighting against "prostitution, concubinage, and the abuse of family power; to raise the consciousness of women and help them to discover their social function."<sup>213</sup>

All these goals were clearly manifested through the Chinese Communist Party's policies toward women. These policies were directed to liberate women, "from their traditional semi-existence, to go to work for the Chinese people." As part of its strategy to mobilize women toward their goal, they set up the Militant National Women's Association for about 300,000 women.<sup>214</sup>

However, as a result of the 1923 resolution of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, the Chinese Communist Party followed Stalin's advice to subordinate



itself to the Kuomintang. It consequently led to Chiang Kai-shek's successful reaction against women's emancipation in the 1927 purge.<sup>215</sup>

It was in the same year that the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party split. After that, the Chinese Communist Party retreated to the rural bases in the countryside of Hunan and Kiangsi.

"In the rural base areas that the (Communist Party) retreated to, the status of women changed dramatically under the impact of mass mobilizations. They were granted inheritance and property rights as well as freedom of marriage and divorce ...."<sup>216</sup>

They also experienced free participation in women's organizations and even in military tasks like guerrilla groups.

These rural base areas were under constant attacks by Chiang's regime. Finally they could sustain no more and the base areas had to be abandoned. The Chinese Communists from these base areas were forced to take the "Long March" in Oct., 1934 and fled into Northeastern China in order to stay away from the Kuomintang's purges. Women were only assigned restricted and special roles within the Red Army to take care of public health and supply tasks.<sup>217</sup> It was in the course of the "Long March" that Mao Tse-tung emerged as the central leader of the Chinese Communist Party in Jan., 1935. The "Long March" ended in Oct. 1935 when the Chinese Communists finally arrived at Yen-an in Northern Shensi Province.<sup>218</sup>

Meanwhile, "Japan which had already taken large

sections of Manchuria and Northern China, was clearly planning a further invasion." It led to the formation of a united front of the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang, to resist the Japanese attack. Once again, women played a major role in productive activities during the period from 1936 to 1945. These productive activities included making shoes and clothes for soldiers and transporting military supplies to the front where the soldiers were fighting against the Japanese.

It is noteworthy that during that anti-Japanese movement, women played a remarkable part. They held demonstrations against the Japanese invasion. Female textile workers went on strike in many Japanese owned mills and factories. Furthermore,

"In December 1935 the Women's National Salvation Association was formed in Shanghai and organized demonstrations around slogans such as 'Stop Civil War' 'Form a United Front Against Japan to save the Nation' and 'Women can Emancipate Themselves Only Through Participation in the Resistance'."219

Women in the liberated areas in North China were intensively mobilized under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. They were mobilized to join the anti-Japanese movements in 1937. At the same time they were mobilized to fight for their own liberation. So they decided to enlarge and reform the already established Hsiang Women's Representative Society. They also felt it necessary to form the All Women's Unions in various local administrative districts larger than that of hsiang (village). Large

numbers of qualified women were recruited as members.<sup>220</sup>

After the war, the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party again fought against each other.<sup>221</sup> It was at that time when the Marxists adopted a more radical social programme. That resulted in the existence of more radical attitudes toward the family and divorce.

"Women were encouraged to struggle against 'feudal' family. CCP (Chinese Communist Party) women's groups organized 'Speak Bitterness' sessions where groups of women would gather in the villages and publicly recount the humiliations of the old system, the beatings, the rapes. This unique form of struggle served to translate the personal anguish of women into a collective anger against the system."<sup>222</sup>

The noteworthy relevant changes introduced by the Chinese Communist Party through the course of revolution were the marriage laws initiated by Mao's call to the village women to defend women's interests during the Kiangsi-Soviet period (1927-1933).

"The laws of the Kiangsi-Soviet of most concern to women were the two marriage laws promulgated by the Central Executive Committee: The first (Chung-hua So-wei-ai Kung-he-kuo hun-yin t'siao-li) in late 1931, and the second (Chung-hua Su-wei-ai hun-yin fa) in April 1934."<sup>223</sup>

Both laws became the blue prints for the later Communist Marriage Law. These laws were the first examples in China's history that claimed the states' involvement in the marriage system of the people by requiring the legal registration of marriage and divorce.<sup>224</sup>

It was after the Sino-Japanese War that the Chinese Communists initiated the radical changes in agricultural

policy. The most remarkable feature was the land-reform which brought forth some deep and significant changes concerning women. The most important change guarantees that women have equal rights to the land as men do. They also have rights in the disposal of property in the family.<sup>225</sup> These have really raised the morale and consciousness of women. Thus, they have become increasingly unwilling to remain subordinate to the degrading roles in the family and in society.<sup>226</sup>

By and large, women have been respected all through the Communist movement in China. That perhaps is mainly because they have been the "co-equals" of the Chinese revolution.<sup>227</sup> Nevertheless, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, women were at first greatly mobilized to participate in a variety of activities. These included participation in industry to provide clothing and necessities for the soldiers in the front, and to raise the gross productivity in society as well. Besides, they also participated in activities like

"agricultural production, handicraft (textile especially) industry, contribution of weapon and food, consolation, helping the soldiers' families, transportation, nursing and medical care, fighting in the front, and political participation."<sup>228</sup>

These were particularly evident after 1942 when the Chinese Communists began the construction programme in the liberated areas. They encouraged women to take part in farming. Thus "women in the liberated areas ground the rice

and wheat, roasted and dried food, and delivered it to the front." Generally speaking, women working as farmers constituted 40 to 50 per cent of the total labour force in some regions and they never constituted less than 15 per cent of it.<sup>229</sup> Most noteworthy is that women working in agricultural production even constituted up to 90 per cent of the total labour force in northern China; for nearly all the men there were drawn out to fight the war.<sup>230</sup>

The most necessary functions for women in the liberated areas to perform were nursing and medical care. They even donated blood for the needy soldiers.

"When the Kuomintang was trying to wipe out the liberated areas, the women hid the wounded soldiers in their homes and underground. There were a number of women who actually joined the guerrilla bridges (sic), and worked in the front."<sup>231</sup>

It was particularly the case in 1947 - 1949 when the guerrilla warfare occurred in eastern China. By then, women constituted 80 - 90 per cent of all the medical personnel over that district.<sup>232</sup>

Furthermore, women in the liberated areas were mobilized to join the local army -- the "self-defence army", in order to help protect the liberated areas.<sup>233</sup> Going hand in hand with that was the mobilization of women to participate in political and military departments in the liberated areas of north-western China. They could hold the posts as officers in those departments and as representatives of the villages. It is noteworthy that a large proportion of educated women

were mobilized in political participation too.<sup>234</sup> At this point, there seems to be a parallel in the western societies like the U.S. and Britain where the status of women was raised owing in part to their participations in the two world wars.

All in all, during the period of 1927 - 1949, women in most liberated areas in China ran their activities largely according to the general guidelines of the Chinese Communist Party. Being mobilized by the Chinese Communist Party, the consciousness of the women was greatly aroused. The idea of equality between men and women was by then emphasized in those liberated areas.

## CHAPTER VII

### REASONS BEHIND THE RISE OF CHINESE WOMEN'S STATUS ACCOMPANYING THE CHINESE COMMUNIST REVOLUTION

#### THE COMMUNISTS AIMED AT CHANGING THE CHINESE SOCIAL SYSTEM COMPLETELY

If the Chinese Communist Revolution brought drastic changes in the status of Chinese women, this fact requires explanation. One noteworthy reason is that the Chinese Communists have taken women as an oppressed class. It was even apparently acknowledged that unlike men in China who were subjected to only three systems of authority; women in China were subjected to political authority, clan authority and religious authority, as well as the authority of the husband. Thus, the Chinese Communists have taken socialism as the pre-requisite for women's liberation, believing that in order for women to be liberated, they have to engage in general political struggle against all the four authorities.<sup>235</sup>

Closely related to the destruction of the oppressive kinds of authorities was the drastic change in the homelife of women. This drastic change could only be brought forth under the economic influences that forced women out of their homes and villages into the factories. The Chinese Communists

have for long subordinated women's struggle to class struggle. They have been holding that like all oppressed classes, women in pre-revolutionary China must be liberated, but changes in the status of women "can take place only in conjunction with other changes."<sup>236</sup> They believed that as well as suffering from general social and economic oppressions, women suffered "in addition a special form of oppression resulting from the unique conditions which affect women alone of all social groups."<sup>237</sup>

Women's emancipation was facilitated and supported by a revolutionary ideology that "insisted that the liberation of women was necessary to create the new society."<sup>238</sup> At the same time, the feminists committed themselves to fight for liberation of women in the context of a free and new society.<sup>239</sup>

The Chinese Communists' aimed at a complete turn-over of the feudal system. It is a matter of fact that the Communist revolutionaries took "the revolution of women's rights as part of the destruction of the old social order." They aimed at "the restructuring of fixed social relationships -- class, political status, and the clan and lineage systems in the community."<sup>240</sup> Thus, women's liberation was given top priority in the Chinese Communist revolution in which the Chinese revolutionaries were to free the Chinese women "as a means of attacking the extended family and destroying the power of the clan head and paterfamilias."

It was evident in the fact that all through the



Communist movement, its members had been energetic in developing the family revolution and its related ideological movements and reforms. Their utmost efforts were manifested through series of regulations promulgated throughout the Communist movement. Those regulations included the Marriage Regulations of the Chinese Soviet Republic of 1931, the Temporary Marriage Regulations of the Chinese Soviet Republic in 1931, and the Marriage Regulations of the Border Area of Chahai and Hopei provinces.<sup>241</sup> All these laid the foundation for the further promulgation of the New Marriage Law on May 1, 1950 -- which I shall touch upon in greater detail later on.

By and large, the aims of these efforts had for long been embedded in the pre-revolutionary peasant movements. One of the goals of those peasant movements was to wipe out the oppression of Chinese women. It could be achieved when "the clan authority of the elders and ancestral temples as well as the husbands' masculine authority were overthrown".<sup>242</sup> These are necessary because the respect for one's elders was one of the most important aspects of traditional Chinese family life that was the root of the "excessive and sometimes tyrannical authority" in a family.<sup>243</sup>

#### FOR GAINING WIDER SUPPORT FOR THE COMMUNIST REVOLUTION

The Communist Revolution has helped bring greater advances in the women's emancipation because all through

the revolution the Chinese Communists needed greater support from the Chinese people. Perhaps the Chinese Communists realized that

"since the people most disadvantaged or oppressed in the old society were the ones who could most quickly be brought to feel frustration or bitterness at their position, women were politically a good source of recruits to the struggle for change."<sup>244</sup>

It was not surprising to see the Chinese Communists try to enlist the support from the other half of the population -- i.e. the female population, besides striving for massive support from the men. It was particularly the case, during the Chinese Communist Soviet period after 1927. At that time, the Chinese Communists really needed more popular support to advance the revolution to build the firm foundation for their regime.<sup>245</sup>

They did that by not only stressing the importance of equality of women with men, "but granted it in their revolutionary work, and had great respect for their abilities."<sup>246</sup> Furthermore, the Chinese Communists insisted on incorporating women into the overall mass movements rather than in the sex-oriented movements. Perhaps it is as Sizette Leith and Jack Bladen have suggested:

"In the women of China the Communists possessed, almost ready made, one of the greatest masses of disinherited human beings the world has ever seen ... and because they found the key to the hearts of those women, they also found one of the keys to victory over Chiang Kai-shek."<sup>247</sup>

The mass movements that Chinese women were to participate in were the peasant movement and the labor movement.

The Chinese Communists were particularly interested in mobilizing the women workers because they were easier to organize. Most of these women were independent of their families for they lived apart from their families. Besides, many of them were unmarried and were free from their husband's domination. Most important of all, it was highly possible for these women workers to realize the oppression of the capitalist system in which they were participants. Thus they would become more inclined to movements that would hasten the destruction of that system than most students and peasant women did. The latter were inclined to perceive their oppression in more exclusively sexual terms.<sup>248</sup>

Even Mao Tse-tung was then fully aware of that point. That really made the Chinese Communists trust that these women workers had the most potential for becoming ardent Communists.<sup>249</sup> Not surprisingly, the Chinese Communists took women as an important ally of revolution in China. Moreover, there is a great compatibility between the Chinese Communists' aims to eradicate the feudal attitudes and to gain wider support from the women.

#### WOMEN HAD PROVEN TO BE ABLE DURING THE CRITICAL AND TOUGH PERIODS

Apart from all previous reasons, we should not ignore the fact that the Chinese women themselves had proven to be of no great difference from men, particularly during

the critical periods.

The first noteworthy fact is throughout the Communist movement girls and women of all classes were "rebellious, determinant and immensely courageous." They marched along with the vanguard in the revolutionary movement. Many women had been anxious to join the Red Army. Indeed, there have been brave women in the partisan groups. They have the good quality and fighting spirit to be good soldiers in any ordinary army. It was particularly evident during the Kiangsi-Soviet period and through the Long March.

In the Kiangsi-soviets women did every kind of work in the rear. They were even organized into fighting units. Though never engaged in formal warfare, they did well "at capturing the enemy's supplies and arms and defeated one or two enemy regiments there."<sup>250</sup> During the Long March, women were mobilized to be the Red Guards to help defend the Soviets.

Furthermore, during the Sino-Japanese War (1937 - 1945), for example, not only the consciousness of the women themselves but their political consciousness also reached a high pitch. They contributed energetically to the war efforts by working as "nurses, social workers, propagandists, members of industrial cooperatives, members of guerrilla detachments and even as soldiers."<sup>251</sup> That at least had hastened the pace for availing both educational and economic opportunities to women.

The changes during such periods were the consequences

of their active participation and demonstration of their actual competence.<sup>252</sup> All these further manifested the fact that the need for extra labour in the war effort strengthened the principle of social equality for women. The act also enabled millions of women to gain at least partial economic independence.<sup>253</sup> Not surprisingly, the Communists recognized the potential strength of the women's movement. They even "emphasized political action as the leading instrument for attaining the goal of the women's movement."<sup>254</sup> Thus, it is safe to say that

"the Sino-Japanese War (1937 - 1945) with its increased demand for labour power and dislocation of families, intensified the trend toward independence and responsibility among women."<sup>255</sup>

All these perhaps constituted the strong urge for the Chinese Communists to put great efforts in running the campaigns for the betterment of the status of the Chinese women. There is vivid evidence of the Chinese Communists' efforts. That was in 1926 when the Chinese Communists decided

"to make a political arm out of the women's movement by working out systematic tactics for recruiting and organizing its members by expanding the movement from the modern urban intelligentsia to women workers and peasants ... The setting up of a large number of representatives' conferences of women peasants and workers in this period was an expression of this."<sup>256</sup>

Besides, there was the Chinese Communists' promulgation of Marriage Regulations.

Apart from those, another noteworthy evidence is the setting up of the women's organizations, particularly

in the liberated areas just shortly before the liberation of China. Indeed, after the Chinese Communist Party assumed power, the picture of the organization of women's movement in China was changed. The women's activities became well-organized.

"The organizational efforts became persistent, systematic and extensive, affecting an increasing proportion of the female population."<sup>257</sup>

The setting up of these organizations was consistent with the belief that real change could only be achieved through mobilization on as a large scale as possible. It was through such mass mobilization that women could gain their sense of identity through participation. Among all women's organizations, women's congresses have been taken as "the best form of organization to bring women together on a large scale and more democratically."<sup>258</sup>

The most remarkable organization formed by that time was the All-China Democratic Women's Federation or (League). It

"was formed at the first National Congress of Women Role March 24 to April 3, 1969, in Peking. Other organizations affiliated with it included the Women's Christian Temperance Union of China, the National Committee of the YWCA of China, the Chinese Women's Social Association, and the late established one -- the Chinese People's National Committee for the Defence of Children."<sup>259</sup>

## CHAPTER VIII

### MEANS OF ACHIEVING WOMEN'S LIBERATION BY THE CHINESE COMMUNISTS

#### LAND REFORM

Throughout the Communist movement, the Chinese Communists had been energetic in working for women's emancipation, but it was only after they had established their own régime in China that many measures could be carried out fully without encountering interference of the Kuomintang. It does not mean that only after the establishment of their own régime in October, 1949 that the Chinese Communists began carrying out their own measures in advancing the women's emancipation. As aforementioned, even under the rule of the Nationalist regime, the Chinese Communist Party had been engaging in the emancipation of women. They had helped set up the women's organizations. They also had promulgated their marriage regulations and had carried out a variety of related campaigns, etc.

The more remarkable measures had been the land reform and marriage reform. First of all, let us look at the effects of the land reform on women's emancipation in China.

It is noteworthy that the land reform was begun during the Communist Movement. It was carried over to the early period immediately after Liberation. The Chinese Communists realized that the land reform by the Government of the "Chinese Soviet" was the only way to liberate women, and at the same time to wipe out feudal bondage.<sup>260</sup>

The land reform not only overthrew the landlord system; it also wiped out the male monopoly of land ownership. For example,

"the Agrarian Law, like the 1948 resolution on women, ruled that men and women should receive equal shares of land and directed that separate property deeds should be issued where necessary."<sup>261</sup>

Thus it is not surprising that it has been the source that gives women the most "solid foundation for economic independence." For the first time, Chinese women had their own land. In addition, their greater participation in economic production has also raised their status considerably. They have at least gained new independence and dignity.<sup>262</sup> The right to have a share in the land helped unite the women who were still divided in regards to some other questions.<sup>263</sup> With their own property, women have been able to further their struggles for equal rights in other fields, like marriage and divorce rights.<sup>264</sup>

Besides, land reform has also helped reduce the economic pressure that hindered the youths' marriages in the past. The land reform has enabled women to participate



in production, helping to change the basic authoritarian structure of the family and has "made young people's independence a more practical possibility."<sup>265</sup> Thus it is clear that the land reform with its emerging chances for female participation in labour has brought drastic changes in the lives of Chinese women. Equality between men and women was once again emphasized in that reform.<sup>266</sup>

#### MARRIAGE REFORM

Like the land reform, the marriage reform had already been dealt with in the pre-revolutionary period. But more thorough reform in wiping out the roots of the traditional marriage system came out shortly after the establishment of the Communist Regime in China. It was actually carried out in conjunction with the Land Reform of 1950. Both the Marriage Reform and the Land Reform were employed "to shake up the whole 'feudalistic' order and to prepare the ground for the new socialist society."<sup>267</sup>

The New Marriage Law was promulgated on May 1, 1950. It is one of the most important steps that the Chinese Communist authorities have taken to further women's liberation. It grants women complete equality with men. As evident at the beginning of that Law, it stresses that:

"The arbitrary and compulsory feudal marriage system, which is based on the superiority of men over women and which ignores the children's interests shall be abolished."<sup>268</sup>

It does ensure the "free choice of marriage partners, monogamy, equal rights of divorce and protection of unwed mothers as well as illegitimate children."<sup>269</sup> The provisions of such Law stress that marriage now is to be based on free love "without money or gifts in kind being demanded by either side." Monogamy has done away with the custom of taking concubines. Male-supremacy within the family has been dealt with by the existence of equal rights of both sexes, particularly in regard to divorce. The legal minimum age of consent to marriage is set to be 20 for males and 18 for females. Besides, the patriarchal powers of father over the children have been lessened. These are terms included in those significant Articles of the New Marriage Law 1950.<sup>270</sup>

With the New Marriage Law promulgated, there are no more arranged marriages and match-making, bigamy, child-betrothal. Wives and daughters are protected from being sold as commodities. Infanticide is now prohibited.<sup>271</sup> Husbands and wives are now equal in rights to possess, manage and inherit their family property.<sup>272</sup> Furthermore, the New Marriage Law even undermines the long-time value of taking marriage as a means to produce male descendants.<sup>273</sup> This is further manifested through the simplification of marriage ceremonies that in turn lessens the expenses of marriage. Thus it reduces the importance of parents' role in the marriage of their children. It also alleviates the social pressure of the general kinship system on the

matrimonial affairs of the young.<sup>274</sup> Also simplified have been the costumes that the bride and the groom put on in the wedding. Though special wedding clothing is still used, it is far simpler than the traditional costumes.<sup>275</sup>

In addition, the new marriages are secularized with the removal of the various religious acts like bowing to the ancestors and offering sacrifices. This somehow weakens

"the dominance of the parents and the family over the married son and daughter-in-law, a dominance which was strengthened by sacred sentiment in the traditional ceremonies."<sup>276</sup>

Furthermore, the legal minimum ages for marriage are now at an older level as compared with the past. This enables later marriage. The later marriage has significant effects on the couple.

"The man is usually economically more independent after the age of twenty ... His greater economic value significantly reduces the importance of the role of the parents and the family in marriage and consequently undermines the authority of the latter over his married life. An older daughter-in-law is also a less malleable person to be molded into her traditional position in a complex family situation ... All these have serious effects on the role structures of the traditional family."<sup>277</sup>

The couple can now have control over their marriage, thus preventing such traditional practices "as the taking of child-brides, 'marrying the spirit' or taking a 'daughter-in-law in anticipation.'"<sup>278</sup> Also, a higher minimum age for marriage could eliminate the number of child-births that a married woman would have; this would help raise the status of the married Chinese women as a whole.

By and large, it is quite safe to say that the

Chinese Communists' legal policy on marriage has set the Chinese women freer to participate in productive work outside the home; it has also brought some profound changes in the relationships between men and women, parents and children. Not surprisingly, Nancy Milton has written

"The Marriage Law, which gave to Chinese women, for the first time in their history, rights in regard to marriage, divorce, child-custody and property ownership represented in China an earth-shaking change in one of the oldest continuous forms of family structures in the world."<sup>279</sup>

It is clear that the New Marriage Law has attained its basic purposes successfully to a considerable extent. The two original purposes it has attained are "down with the old feudal family, up with responsibility for women." As more explicitly stressed by the vice-president of the All-China Democratic Women's Federation, this New Marriage Law was "to ensure to people the full freedom of marriage, and to deal a death blow to the old marriage system."<sup>280</sup>

Through the promulgation of such New Marriage Law\*, Chinese women have gained the rights that were non-existent in China before. The rights include rights to divorce, right of freedom in marriage, rights of child custody and property ownership.

This reform was really a drastic one. Only the work of its preparation had taken quite a while before the

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\*A summary of the significant points in the Marriage Law are included in Appendix A.

establishment of the People's Republic. In order to publicize and enforce such a reform the Communist authorities put much effort on indoctrinating the local leaders after the promulgation of such new laws. "It was not the responsibility of the court alone to get it implemented; the whole population was asked to live by it, publicize it and to support anyone who tried personally to benefit by it."<sup>281</sup> At the same time, the government agencies and youth and women's organizations accelerated the propaganda campaigns. These were facilitated through "newspapers, magazines, special booklets and comic strips, stories, posters and leaflets."<sup>282</sup> The most remarkable and intensive indoctrination campaign was carried out in 1953. That campaign is claimed to have yielded "some 3,500,000 lower echelon leaders," trained in the interpretation of the New Marriage Law, and given the duty of spreading it to both cities and countryside throughout China. This was by then a necessary step for the Chinese Communists to take in order to effectively enforce the new marriage principles, since, at that time ignorance was widespread not only among the peasantry but also among local Communist officials.<sup>283</sup>

Thus, in order to ensure that those illiterate people knew at least the basic idea of the Marriage Law, "thousands of drama troupes were organized to take plays and skits about it to the villages." It was also publicized in the newspaper. Also, locally organized literacy class and

newspaper-reading groups were set up specially for the purpose of propagating the new law among the masses of people.<sup>284</sup>

The implementation of this New Marriage Law aroused the awareness of women. Upon the enacting of this law in May, 1950, oppressed women in all provinces rushed to secure divorces immediately. In Shanghai, for example, divorce cases doubled. In North China, the same law called forth a rush of divorce cases that made up 65% of all civil cases. "In Peking, sixty per cent of the cases were brought by the wife. In Liaotung Province the figure was ninety per cent."<sup>285</sup> "According to government figures there were 186,000 divorces in 1950, 409,000 in 1951 and 396,000 in the first six months of 1952." The Marriage Law was even popularly referred to as a divorce law.<sup>286</sup> It is noteworthy that the frequent grounds for pleas made by women demanding divorce included "cruel mistreatment by mother-in-law permitted by husband", "no feeling of love between husband and wife."<sup>287</sup> This, of course, is a great step forward in emancipation from the Chinese women's standpoint of view. However, it also aroused strong oppositions from the conservative sector of Chinese society. By and large, its implementation "was slackened in the second half of the 1950's, (and) old practices re-emerged."<sup>288</sup>

Despite all the efforts to publicize the new marriage law, its implementation remained unsatisfactory,

particularly during the incipient stage. "The campaign is said to have encouraged many unhappy people to seek divorce and to have reformed cadres with feudal attitudes to marriage and divorce."<sup>289</sup> Nevertheless, it was reported that even at this period, many arranged marriages continued to take place.

Even worse was that many cadres continued to support the parents whenever cases involved children demanding free choice in marriage.<sup>290</sup> They were perhaps those whom the Party had never indoctrinated in the Marxist concept of women's emancipation. They were still anxious supporters of male-supremacy in social as well as family contexts. Not surprisingly, they were, like most of the Chinese peasants by then, resistant to the New Marriage Law.<sup>291</sup> They also stood on the side of the husbands to hinder their wives' demands for divorce. For example,

"in 1951, 10,000 women were said to have suffered death by suicide or homicide in central South China alone after family disputes about questions of marriage and divorce, and in 1955 it was estimated that 70,000 -- 80,000 were dying annually because of such disputes."<sup>292</sup>

As far as the reactions from the males toward such new law are concerned, they felt that their authority was undermined both in the family and in the village community. Furthermore, when divorce could be demanded freely by the women, their economic interests would be harmed. That was because through divorce they lost their wives as useful domestic labourers. For the women, not all of them could accept such drastic change immediately. This was particularly

true of those

"older women who felt threatened by the freedom of choice in marriage as it undermined their control over their daughters and daughters-in-law, the one small share of power they were familiar within the old society."<sup>293</sup>

It took time for the Chinese people to be indoctrinated and to get accustomed to the New Marriage Law. Their resistance to it subsided steadily. Consequently, they have changed their age-old opposing attitudes toward the Marriage Law. It is, by and large, the women and young people who lent most supports to it at all stages of its implementation.<sup>294</sup>

On the whole, that was only one of the remarkable aspects and an initial step of the women's movement under the Chinese Communist regime.

"Other aspects of the movement included political organization and economic mobilization, with the latter taking precedence over marriage reform upon the launching of China's collectivization programs."<sup>295</sup>

#### OTHER CHANGES IN FAMILY LIFE BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION MOVEMENT UNDER THE CHINESE COMMUNISTS

##### Overall Social Changes

Being quite comprehensive, the New Marriage Law of 1950 of the People's Republic of China regulates many aspects of the family life, bringing fundamental changes in the structures of the Chinese traditional families. It is evident in the principles entrenched in the Marriage Law. Broadly speaking, these principles guarantee: monogamy, free choice of marriage partner, equal inheritance rights,



equal rights to divorce either through mutual consent or insisted by either spouse.<sup>296</sup> All these signify a fundamental and thorough change from the traditional system. Though the laws under Nationalist regime originally intended such transformation of the traditional Chinese family, the Kuomintang did not put much effort into translating those laws into effective action.<sup>297</sup>

However it does not mean that the Chinese Communists launched a full-scale attack on the family system through the implementation of the New Marriage Law. It has not destroyed the nuclear family and intimate relationships between parents and their children. The principle regarding this aspect holds that the State will not molest the family if filial considerations in the family do not obstruct any loyalty to the State on her way to building a socialist society.<sup>298</sup> The Chinese Communists do urge a lesser regard for parents when the State or the Party calls for the massive support of the people. Nevertheless, the Chinese Communists have not advocated any disregard for parents in any positive way. Instead, "children can be exhorted as responsible Communists to respect and support their aged parents."<sup>299</sup> Thus, the functions and the importance of family are not abolished completely, but they are minimized.<sup>300</sup>

It is true that the Chinese Communist regime is concerned with redesigning the family system as part of the fabric of the whole society. And the implementation of

the Marriage Law in 1950 indeed marked the beginning of the nation-wide change, for the new laws have really called forth alternation in the traditional family system. That has directly or indirectly made the state pick up the central role in shaping the lives of individuals instead of leaving that role as the traditional responsibility of the Chinese family. Thus, the state's authority has displaced the paternalism of elders.<sup>301</sup> The Chinese Communists have also tried to lessen the influences of the clan system and Confucianism that embody the traditional ideals of the Chinese family system.<sup>302</sup> As a matter of fact, the traditional Chinese kinship organization is obstructive to the building up of a socialist state in China.

Being guaranteed the freedom of marriage, freer courtship became more quickly and firmly established in the towns. This made possible the unrestricted free-choice of marriage partners based on interests of the young people. However, changes in the general social attitudes are still slow. Not only is the "western-style" courtship still limited, puritanism is still greatly stressed. It is still the case that a couple would be considered as ill-mannered if they hold hands in public.

"Premarital sex, though not theoretically illegal, met with strong social disapproval, and when classed as seduction has occasionally joined adultery in being treated as a crime punishable in the courts."<sup>303</sup>

Despite those remaining limitations, there have really been great advances in comparison with the traditional

values regarding marriage and divorce. One noteworthy improvement has been the social attitude toward the remarriage of widows. In the past, widows were not allowed to remarry. It had been believed that a woman belonged to her husband's family. She was not to break the link with it when her husband passed away, though she was still young.

"This idea was as strong in communities where families had formerly disposed of widows for their own gain as it was where they had kept them for life as daughters-in-law, and the fact that a widow was free to get married when she wished and to the man of her own choice was equally unacceptable to both."<sup>304</sup>

With the New Law implemented, the old ideas and practices are not effective anymore. The traditional role of women in Chinese society is completely uprooted and reorganized. They are being made to forsake their traditional role as homemakers. It is now common in China to find decision-making power being equally shared by husband and wife.<sup>305</sup> This situation is obvious in the newly emerged and popular "neo-local" type of families.

#### Sexual Morality is Changed to Facilitate Women's Participation

Closely related to the freedom of marriage guaranteed by the 1950's New Marriage Law, changes in the standard of sexual morality have been brought forth. A remarkable characteristic of standard of morality in post-revolutionary China has been the gradual loosening of the stiffness of the male and female relationships.

Nowadays in Communist China, it is not uncommon to see boys and girls participate in the night dances. These dances are even regularly sponsored by organizations like government offices, factories and social groups. The participation of young people in these dances would have been regarded as "immoral" in an earlier generation. It is not so now. There has been such a great advance that young boys and girls are now encouraged to dance.

However, it has been observed that the dancers "were inclined to look a little serious, as though they were undertaking an important task. They hold their partners at arm's length."<sup>306</sup> It is noteworthy that it is just for the purpose of social merging of the sexes that dancing is being encouraged. As a matter of fact, the post-revolutionary Chinese society is still characterized by a definite strength of puritanism. That strain "probably represents a revolt against the licence of an out-dated feudal ruling elite."<sup>307</sup> Yet one must not overlook the other possible reason for the presence of puritanism might be the rise of industrialization; in the west, early industrialization had been accompanied by sexual puritanism as well.

Moreover, romantic love is taken as bourgeois and decadent. Perhaps it is the reason for young men and women to "be subject to such strict surveillance under the eyes of party cadres and their peers."<sup>308</sup> The strain of puritanism was shown through the fact that dating is not encouraged,

though it is permitted among the young students and workers. Furthermore, pre-marital intimacies are severely criticized. Cases of pregnancies before marriage are present and forced separation have been known to occur when pre-marital intimacies are detected.<sup>309</sup> One cannot help having an impression that the Marriage Law has somehow called forth a tremendous tightening up of the standard of sexual morality.<sup>310</sup> In the Chinese Communist regime, puritan sexual morality is taken as an integral part of the women's liberation.

Not surprisingly, the cadres of the Chinese Communist Party are holding that:

"Of course, we have our love affairs, but it's like everything else -- you have to sort out what gets the highest priority in your life. And we don't feel that sexual love should take (too) high a place."<sup>311</sup>

This indicates that in China, sexual morality is closely linked to the whole social morality that values highly the principle of "serving the people."<sup>312</sup>

#### The Abolition of Prostitution

Appearing hand in hand with the tone of puritanism was the further effort exerted to root out prostitution. Although while the Kuomintang was in power there had already been laws promulgated to prohibit prostitution, there had not been any great efforts to carry out such laws effectively. So prostitution was still

widespread in pre-Liberation China.<sup>313</sup> The Chinese Communists had already brought forth the issue of abolishing prostitution even during the Kiangsi period of the Communist Movement. However, it was not formally included as a provision of any legislation. Prohibition of prostitution became formally included as a provision in the New Marriage Law.<sup>314</sup> With the abolition of prostitution, "(i)n 1950, two hundred brothels in Peking were closed, the whores given merit badges and re-educated for new roles."<sup>315</sup>

Changes in Dress and Hair Style as well as in Social Attitudes on Sex

Another reform enhancing the strain of puritanism has been the simplification of dress and hairstyle. This has been a measure that has its goal of eliminating or lessening the role of Chinese women as sex objects. The Chinese Communists have eliminated most forms of external sexual differentiation. "Characteristically enough, the emancipation of women under the Communists began with their apparel."<sup>316</sup> Consequently, women's clothing has become

"purely functional, designed to cover and protect, not to delineate or arouse. Women wear baggy pants, generally button-up-the-front jacket -- all loose fitting."<sup>317</sup>

Besides, hairstyle is simplified for the same purpose. It is usually cut short.<sup>318</sup> Women and girls wear no make up, neither do they wear any jewellery. Furthermore, women are not addressed as Miss or Mrs., but as

"Comrades." Most of them generally retain their maiden names after marriage. There is no advertisement about sex or love on billboards. Thus, "women are generally portrayed in their relationship to their country and more specifically to the revolution."<sup>319</sup>

With all these measures carried out, women in the post-revolutionary Chinese society can now be regarded "as persons rather than primarily as women in one's relations with them."<sup>320</sup> However, they give people an impression that Chinese women lack femininity.<sup>321</sup> Thus, in 1955 the Chinese government shifted its policy to run a "look gayer campaign." Speeches and newspaper articles argued for "the desirability of introducing color and gaiety into women's clothing."<sup>322</sup> This shows that the Chinese Communist government now allows or even encourages women to be feminine to a limited extent. However, owing to the deep-rooted puritanism the women in Communist China seem to have not been very energetic in complying to the call of that campaign.<sup>323</sup>

Martin Bernal concludes that the prevailing unisex clothing<sup>324</sup> is to "reduce differences in rank at all levels," except for a small number of politically privileged women in high positions.<sup>325</sup> Nevertheless, it certainly has implication of equality between the sexes. Hence, the status of women has doubtlessly improved immensely.<sup>326</sup>

In addition, the promulgation of the Marriage Law

also brought forth the actual abolition of foot-binding.<sup>327</sup> This, to a certain extent, has also helped enhancing puritanism. Bound-feet had been taken as symbols of sex appeal.<sup>328</sup> It is noteworthy that the movement to end binding feet had been initiated since the bourgeois revolution of 1911. However, that was not enforced seriously until the Chinese Communists formally endorsed that prohibition.<sup>329</sup> Besides enhancing puritanism, abolition of foot-binding "meant that in future women would cease to suffer from what had once been their worst handicap ..."<sup>330</sup>

By and large, such reform is to rid women the opportunity of being taken as sex-objects. Moreover, it is to enhance greater equality between the sexes on the one hand and to discourage nationalism and class consciousness on the other hand. Thus, needless to mention further, under Chinese Communism no profit is to be made by exploiting sex. It is noteworthy that though puritanism is stressed, yet the Chinese still take sex as a natural but private function.<sup>331</sup>

S. Chandrasekhar concluded from what he had seen in Shanghai in the later 1950's, that the abolition of prostitution was a reform effected by People's Republic of China with incredible scope and seeming success.<sup>332</sup> All prostitutes had been given treatment for their physical rehabilitation from venereal disease at the Prostitute Reformation Centres. Educational orientation was given.



It was mostly political education, including some Marxist-Leninist principles of the new society. Besides, they were taught various skills according to their age, ability and aptitude, so that they could earn their own livings as workers if they were unwilling to return home or in case their homes or relatives were unwilling to receive them. The re-education programme emphasized ideological training aimed at restoring the self-respect and dignity of these prostitutes.<sup>333</sup>

According to what S. Chandrasekhar had heard, some of the prostitutes did run away while they were undergoing rehabilitation in the Prostitute Reformation Centres. But they no longer could make a living in their former ways. In the centre, the prostitutes set up a committee to ensure those leaving had undergone thorough rehabilitation. Sometimes some ex-prostitutes did not want to leave to face the world. This problem had been solved because many centres are, in fact, factories. Those who did not leave could work there. By and large, most of them returned to normal lives after rehabilitation. Many got married and set up homes too.<sup>334</sup>

Meanwhile, there have been parallel efforts exerted by the Chinese Communist regime to make "most of the monks and nuns (in the Catholic and other orders) return to the laity and get married."<sup>335</sup>

Anti-Confucianism and Criticism of Lin Piao: Their  
Implications on the Women's Emancipation in China

Apart from all those aforementioned measures, another means taken by the Chinese Communists to facilitate women's liberation has been the movement to criticize Confucianism and Lin Piao. This movement seems to be very consistent with the Marriage Reform in the sense that both aspects of the movement are aimed at transforming the traditional Chinese family system.

As we have known by now, male-supremacy in traditional Chinese society was deeply entrenched in the family system which was further strengthened by Confucianism. "The Confucian ideal also stressed that women should lead an enclosed life. These ideas were still present, particularly in some northern provinces like northern Shaanxi after the liberation (of China)."<sup>336</sup> It is a matter of fact that under the influences of Confucianism, subservience of women had been a basic principle under the old system.<sup>337</sup> In order to reform that, the Chinese Communists had carried out various movements as well as measures both at the pre-Communist period and the post-revolutionary period. The most important of which were the land reform and marriage reform. Besides aiming at suppressing the Confucian family ideals that were degrading women, these have been the measures that the Chinese Communist regime uses to suppress and to attack Confucianism and the large clans, "which were the

most complete embodiment of the Confucian family ideals."<sup>338</sup>

Furthermore, the Chinese Communists have substituted the formulations of Confucius with those of Marx and Lenin's as the guidelines for reorganizing Chinese society. This has been one of the great intellectual changes brought forth by the Chinese Communist regime.<sup>339</sup>

Consequently, many of the patterns of living characterizing traditional Chinese society underwent changes as soon as the Chinese Communists had carried out the reforms. However, because Confucian ethics and values "are entrenched in the vast cultural store that is shared by all Chinese," they were or even are still influential in the post-revolutionary Chinese society, perpetuating male-supremacy and hindering the progress of women's emancipation in post-revolutionary China.<sup>340</sup>

Thus campaigns were carried out in Communist China to criticize Confucius and Lin Piao in 1974 and 1975. That was a great and significant struggle "to break down male-supremacy and replace old habits and customs."<sup>341</sup> It is believed that

"as long as the ideal of male-supremacy continues to discriminate against and show contempt for women and while women themselves hold traditional notions of the female role they cannot take advantage of the opportunities available in the new society."<sup>342</sup>

That movement began as a campaign of understanding the link between the role of ideology in society and women's oppression. It aimed at examining and criticizing thoroughly

the influence of traditional ruling ideology, "and applying a new understanding of the role of ideology to the study of women's history and their position in society in China today." Attention was drawn to the origins of discrimination against women fostered by the Confucian code of ethics. Thus they attributed the source of male-supremacy to the social principle developed by Confucius. He lived in a time when slavery was declining gradually and new feudal forces were coming up.

"To bolster the authority of the declining slave owners, he established the authority of the husband and the suppression of women as one of the foundations of their role."<sup>343</sup>

Consequently the codes of ethical conduct for women were developed and became the so-called "three-obediences" and "four-virtues". Thus women's relations with their husbands were taken as equivalent to those between master and servant. Through this campaign of criticizing Confucius, women came to know that it was not their biological foundations that led to their degradation as inferior and hence the traditional division of labour. It originated in the social systems created by a minority of exploiting classes<sup>344</sup> that consisted of slave owners, feudal lords, or capitalists.

Meanwhile, Lin Piao was also criticized as utilising the idea of male-supremacy "to bolster an out-moded social system." He was blamed for slandering women by continuing to hold that "women are backward in thought and ideas. A woman's future is determined by her husband,"

and 'women think only about how to get oil, salt, vinegar, soy sauce, and firewood.'"<sup>345</sup> He was accused of attempting to turn the clock back and restore the feudal code of ethics. This campaign shows that the government had been anxious to make the Chinese women realize that they should understand the role of ideology in society.<sup>346</sup>

The campaign produced positive effects, causing women to become active and participate in and even lead some of the movements of resistance against the Confucian ideology. "They accused the ruling class of all ages of having negated the role of women in the history of resistance."<sup>347</sup> Despite the great effort this campaign has made to improve the status of women in China, this campaign emphasizes ideological factors rather than practical factors.

## CHAPTER IX

### WOMEN'S STATUS IN NEW CHINA

#### WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PRODUCTION AND IN THE OCCUPATIONAL WORLD IN POST-REVOLUTIONARY CHINA

As far as women's occupational participation is concerned, it had begun to develop even before the Chinese Communist regime was set up. Early in the New Culture Movement of 1917 and the May Fourth Movement of 1919, women began to get opportunities to participate in the occupational world. Though the trend developed slowly, yet it provided women a chance to earn their own livings, thus they could shake off their traditional low status.

Perhaps at that time, the Chinese Nationalist government, like their counterpart, also had the same goal of recruiting women workers needed for industrialization. As C.K. Yang has said, the development of occupational opportunities for women, as well as the increasing female participation in production, are important factors for changing the economic status of women in the family and in society. Women can become economically independent at least.<sup>348</sup> Thus even the Marriage Law has included a term guaranteeing women's right to participate in productive

labour.<sup>349</sup>

It is noteworthy that after Liberation, the Chinese Communist government has launched various programmes of large-scale industrialization projects. These have created great demands for labour power. Therefore, women have chances to gain access to various types of careers. Indeed, "from 1949 to 1954 the number of women employed in industrial, commercial, and political jobs increased from 420,000 to 1,900,000 throughout the country."<sup>350</sup>

Moreover, the Chinese Communists not only created greater opportunities for women to participate; they also encouraged women's participation in agriculture-work and industrial production. The Chinese Communists have a typical technique in stimulating the participation of women into productive work through glorifying and rewarding "model workers" in agricultural and industrial spheres.<sup>351</sup>

In the early years after the Chinese Communists regime was established, attempts were made to glorify the unpaid service of the housewives who also participated directly in production. The Chinese Communist regime also created ambivalence for the Chinese women, in attempting to get housewives to see themselves as contributing to society through their housework itself, which freed their husbands for work. Thus most of the wages women earned had usually to be spent on child-care if they had children and had to participate in production.<sup>352</sup>

It is noteworthy that even if the work world had

been opened to women, working women had problems to face.

#### Lack of confidence

"and the contempt in which they were held might not affect women in industries such as the textile industry where they have long been accepted; but these were serious problems for women in heavy industry, for women cadres, and for all other women doing jobs which had formerly been the preserves of men. Difficulties remained even for women who had overcome their own doubts and family opposition, since they often had to face mockery from their fellow workers amongst whom they were a minority."<sup>353</sup>

Meanwhile, the campaign of collectivization has also contributed a great part in pressing greater women's participation in the agricultural work throughout the country.<sup>354</sup> Consequently, women's participation in agricultural work has stepped a great distance away from their traditional participations. In the past, they played only subsidiary roles to help in the fields during the busy seasons.<sup>355</sup> By minimizing the traditional differences between the sexes in the occupational spheres, the Chinese Communist government has got support from millions of women. This also wielded economic gains, because the affirmation of women's right to participate ensured the larger supply of labour for farm work and industrial construction.<sup>356</sup>

The collectivization campaign was carried out with great efforts in 1952 through the organization of the mutual-aid teams that were later changed into cooperatives.<sup>357</sup> But these cooperatives were later replaced by communes for they did not operate very satisfactorily. They have not been managed competently to yield the expected production.



In the communes, collectivization of daily living is the remarkable characteristic. Women have roles assigned to them so as to enable them to participate fully in the occupational system. Thus, their function at home is directly reduced. Their overall status is raised for they are now economically independent.<sup>358</sup> Now almost all (about 90 per cent) of the total female labour force in the rural communes take part in agricultural work. At the same time, "the number and types of jobs these women do have increased threefold or fourfold."<sup>359</sup> They are trained to handle farm machines and to engage in agricultural research.

"In the commune organization, women were playing an equally important role as functionaries. It was said that women served as chairmen and vice-chairmen of about one-fifth of all 25,000 Peoples' Communes, and particularly every production brigade had a woman leader or deputy leader in the early 1960's."<sup>360</sup>

This is perhaps mainly because there have been national rules related to the Land Reform stating that there should not be any phenomenon of "men first, then women."<sup>361</sup>

As far as women's participation in industry is concerned, women are now allowed in certain fields of work like mining and military work that were deemed unsuitable for them because of health reasons. By and large, they participate mainly in the textile and the light industries. There are rapidly growing numbers of women taking jobs in heavy industries too.<sup>362</sup> Hence there is now little noticeable division of jobs along sex lines in most occupations.<sup>363</sup>

Besides, women have gained access to medicine, engineering, architecture, art, and science. "In 1960, there were 10,000 women doctors, including medical research workers in Peking -- about 40 per cent of the capital's total number of doctors."<sup>364</sup> In connection with the increasing chances for women's participation in the occupational world, the Chinese Communists have introduced the "work-point system," particularly in the communes.

"The labour value of the individual family is estimated by the number of work points accumulated by the individuals in the family. In this system, there is equal remuneration for male and female worker depending only on the amount of work done ..."<sup>365</sup>

Just because of this, the Women's Federation had argued that "points of men and women in the same family should be recorded separately."<sup>366</sup>

These trends have to be attributed to Chinese Communists' national policy. That holds that all women are entitled to work in productive labour for pay outside their homes just as men do and they are entitled to receive equal pay for equal work.

It is common to find that most of the commune labourers are women. All of them take part in the work together with their husbands out in the fields. Not only in the fields, but also in many factories can one find women working alongside men on the same precision machinery. Such situations might suggest that there may be no segregation

of jobs according to sex, and give naive outsiders a feeling that there may be, by and large, no discrimination according to the types of jobs taken by men and women.

For example, one can easily find women often outnumber men doing the work alongside men in textile and jute mills, farms and mines or government offices. It is now common to find women guarding airports, bridges and factories. Though rare, yet one can still find women in the police force and the People's Liberation Army, Navy and Air Force as well. They work on equal terms, both in positions of responsibility and in the heavy manual jobs that the non-Communist countries consider unfit for women. As far as the manual jobs are concerned, women are found engaging in road-laying, bridge-building, ditch-digging and dam-raising projects, etc. These jobs require physical strength. This is because, unlike as in western capitalist societies, women in Communist China are strongly motivated by the ideologies supporting equal participation. Also it may be because the Chinese Communist economy is a planned one, so it has been women who are assigned to participate in those jobs.

However, it does not mean that the work world in new China has completely eliminated sex-segregation. In the educational system, for example, teaching in the nurseries and kindergartens is still a woman's job. At the higher levels of the educational ladder, most highly-paid and prestigious jobs are still held by men rather than

women. Jobs in the People's Liberation Army, though open to women, are still mostly reserved for men; while most jobs that have not been mechanized are done by women.<sup>367</sup>

In examining the equality between the sexes in the work world, it is necessary to look also at the reward-system in connection with the jobs picked up by men and women. Having seen all the aforementioned conditions in new China, one might assume that now the Chinese women must be fully employed and must be equally paid.

Such assumption is generally true as referred to the wage-unit system or payment according to commodity-equivalent units as well as extension of piece-rates to all sectors of the Chinese economy adopted during the early periods of the regime.<sup>368</sup> But the piece-rate system created discrepancies between regions in regard to the level of wages as well as higher wage bills. Thus that system was abandoned.<sup>369</sup> It was and has been restored only in a modified form later on. This system is in fact congruent with the principle of rewarding each individual according to his ability or contribution. Thus it is not surprising to find that though wages in the major factories are set according to national standard, there are apparent differences in wages, often inside the factory and brigade or work-team unit in the communes.<sup>370</sup> Perhaps C.K. Yang is right in stating that "a deep-rooted tradition does not suddenly lose its force."<sup>371</sup>

By and large, unskilled manual workers are getting lower wages than those earned by the skilled manual workers who earn in addition to basic wage, the bonuses and piece-rate wages.<sup>372</sup> It is noteworthy that

"top-grade engineers and scientists can receive twice as much as the skilled workers, though certain grades of technicians are getting no more than a skilled worker. Doctors, scientists and engineers are among the highest paid people in the land, and their incomes are far ahead of senior government officials including Ministers."<sup>373</sup>

Thus it is true that as long as the types of work require actual exercise of physical strength or physical labour, they are often less rewarded. These are often the jobs that manifest the existing inequality in the reward-system.

So when we refer back to what has just been examined about the sex-segregation in the work world in new China, the number of women taking up the higher-paid, non-manual jobs are still less than the number of men.<sup>374</sup> This explicitly shows that sex-segregation in the occupational world really exists. Most unskilled manual work is taken up by women. That may perhaps be because of the fact that low skill prevents women from taking up most high-paid jobs.<sup>375</sup>

However, as long as there is neither a radical attack on the stereotyped women's special domestic responsibility, nor a fully developed system of communal services (e.g. canteens and child-care facilities), the Chinese women are or will still have to bear a double-burden.

This perhaps is the reason that in the 50s, women in China were not able to achieve high positions in large number under the newly established regime.<sup>376</sup>

Thus, wage differentials and sexual inequalities are still present to a certain extent, in Communist China. Though it is so, the openness of the work world to women had undoubtedly given women precious chances to become less economically dependent on men. This is particularly true when mechanization helps lessen the need of physical strength as a means of labour productivity. That opens more jobs for women and hence challenges the traditional pattern of division of labour. The road for future material gains of opportunities for women has been paved.<sup>377</sup> This has been clearly manifested during the Great Leap Forward between 1958 and 1959.<sup>378</sup> It was during the Great Leap Forward period that women were given many chances to participate in various social spheres. They became socially productive.<sup>379</sup> However, the post-Great Leap period was characterized by the ambiguity in the social roles assigned to women.<sup>380</sup> Increasingly, there tended to be barriers to women's participation outside the family context. As a matter of fact, there appeared to be a resurgence of traditional practices in regards to marriage and divorce. Women had again to "reconcile their 'female' sexual-maternal roles with their productive roles in the industrial work force." Once again they had to take up the traditional

"double-burden" of domestic and extra-domestic work. It was evident in the early 60s. It was only as industrialization expanded and more child-care nursery and other communal facilities became available that the "double-burden" of women lightened a bit. Yet they still had to take up most responsibilities for their homes and children.<sup>381</sup> At this point, it seems safe for me to argue that the Chinese Communist regime liberates women mainly because of the economic necessity of doing so. In fact, "the freeing of women to rise individually did not alter the fact that the status of women was not equal to that of the men."

It was not until the Cultural Revolution that the obstacle to women's participation in social spheres became less significant. At that time, the Chinese Communists' policies were "at least potentially; capable of integrating the masses of women into the labour force in the process of a socialist construction."<sup>382</sup> Thus the interval between the Great Leap Forward (1958 - 1959) and the climax of the Cultural Revolution (1965 - 1967)

"was crucially significant in revealing more clearly the potentialities and limitations of women's liberation in the process of economic development and the relationship between the women's revolution and socialist revolution."<sup>383</sup>

All in all, these situations cannot but help giving people a feeling that women's liberation in Communist China has been supported by the state as a means to fulfill the motive of economic development.

"Where women's lives have been extremely enclosed, modernization may entail a partial breakdown of traditional barriers, and the demands of a growing economy will draw some women into economic activities outside their houses. However, these activities will probably confer only low pay and status because in such a society women are quite unprepared to compete for the better-paid jobs and it is felt natural that, as women, they should be relegated to secondary roles."<sup>384</sup>

One thing noteworthy is that with the greater participation of women in the occupational sector in Communist China they can organize under the direction of the trade unions. Indeed, women are organized on the basis of their occupations or residences.<sup>385</sup>

Women are not only given greater opportunities to participate in paid-labour, even housewives are encouraged to participate in work outside homes for the unpaid productive work in the so-called "residents' committees."<sup>386</sup>

The work ranges from making shoes and clothes for soldiers to conducting literacy groups and helping working women by setting up low-cost child-care groups.<sup>387</sup> Thus these housewives though not involved in paid-production, they are made to perform a real social function outside home. The Chinese Communists also hold that

"the social worth of the work done by housewives in residents' committees (is) anyway more obvious than that of housework, so that though unpaid it certainly (confers) some prestige."<sup>388</sup>

However, in this way the Chinese women are indeed being exploited rather than liberated.

Under the Chinese Communist regime a higher level



of female employment has been achieved. Measures have been tried, in order to increase women's employment opportunities. These include the provision of welfare facilities like day-care services for working mothers, communal dining halls, etc. All are aimed at alleviating the burden of the household chores so that almost half of China's population can contribute more to society.<sup>389</sup> However, because the welfare services are still insufficient, particularly the child-care services<sup>390</sup>, participation of women in the occupational world constitutes another burden to most women, particularly the housewives. So the Chinese women are still not completely liberated, in this aspect at least. Instead, their participation is encouraged in those fields where intensive labour is needed and when the man-power is insufficient. So it can be argued that the extent of the Chinese women's liberation in the Communist Chinese regime is vulnerable to fluctuations in the Chinese economy as well as the national development policies.<sup>391</sup>

The rate of demand for labour is not unlimitedly expendable. This is particularly the case for the unskilled and inexperienced manual labour. Furthermore, in China's situations, beyond a certain extent, it would be too expensive to substitute collective facilities for the women's labour at home. It is true that

"the modernization of the family and the emancipation of women is not a specifically Communist phenomenon. It is occurring or has occurred at varying rates of

progress in all the developing countries of Africa and Asia. It is indeed a normal feature of economic and social development."<sup>392</sup>

#### PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION

At the time when the Chinese Communist Party took mainland China, eighty per cent of the Chinese population were illiterate. It was reported that the role of the illiteracy "was 66 per cent for rural areas and 24 per cent for cities in 1960."<sup>393</sup> Considering women's low status in the past, it is safe to assume that women might constitute fairly large proportions of the illiterates owing to the fact that women were mostly deprived of the chances of schooling.<sup>394</sup>

It has been the Communists' policy to run anti-illiteracy campaigns.<sup>395</sup> "Under the Communist Regime every city is buzzing with literacy classes for women as well as for men." Besides technical training classes and evening trade classes in the cities are opened to train women students.<sup>396</sup> It has been a prominent feature of the Chinese Communist regime's policies to concentrate on the campaigns against illiteracy. These campaigns are multi-purpose ones. On the one hand, they are drives to teach writing and reading; they also have been the measures to reinforce the so-called "socialist education" which is mainly an integrated "political-moral-social-ethical reshaping of attitudes."<sup>397</sup> It had been an important duty of "The Committees to Improve Women's

Lives" to organize literacy classes for the women even during the Jiangxi Soviet period. The general consequence is the lessened sex-role differentiation at the lower levels of education. In those schools both sexes are trained to enter the same job market.<sup>398</sup>

Thus, there has risen the practice of universal co-educational programmes in which boys and girls study together in classes attending the same course. This prevents difference in education content along the sex lines. For example, in 1960 it was reported that girls constituted one-third of those students enrolled in primary schools. Meanwhile, women constituted 23.3 per cent of the college students enrolled.<sup>399</sup> This was already quite a great advance as compared with the past. More noteworthy is the fact that many fields in higher education -- traditionally considered as men's spheres are now open to female students.<sup>400</sup> This is a step toward the elimination of inferiority of women and girls.<sup>401</sup>

There had been a dramatic change in the educational system under the Chinese Communist regime. Starting from the summer of 1966 (the climax stage of the Cultural Revolution), college and university entrance examinations were abolished.<sup>402</sup> This change enabled children from farmers' and workers' families to be educated in these higher educational institutions -- as no minimum formal education for admission was needed. By and large, this accelerated development of

education opportunities for women has been powerfully reflected through the economic and social status of the new women in new China. It has also altered the Chinese family organization<sup>403</sup> for the Chinese women can now be less economically dependent.

It has been quite clear that the Chinese Communist regime "has presided over many profound and important gains for women secured by the planned economy instituted in 1953,"<sup>404</sup> However, one should not overlook the fact that the Chinese Communist Party has been criticized by its own members for planning policy which subjugated women's demands to

"considerations of party discipline, placation of backward tendencies, privileges for the administrative hierarchy, and an indisguised sympathy of the regime for the bourgeois family while opposing the horrors of pre-capitalist oppression of women."<sup>405</sup>

We should also notice that though inequality at every level of the educational system has been reduced, it still persisted even until the end of the first decade after the establishment of the Chinese Communist regime.<sup>406</sup> That was perhaps because

"education was neither compulsory nor free and fees might involve parents in financial hardship.<sup>407</sup> That could be expected to be a particularly stubborn area of sex-discrimination. As long as marriage continues to be patrilocal or as parents look to their sons rather than daughters for support, and find satisfaction and prestige in the career achievements of boys rather than girls, this will persist."<sup>408</sup>

Thus Delia Davin is right in stating that:

"Discrimination in work and education feeds each other. If it is hard for a woman to have a career her

education may be seen by her parents or even by the state as unprofitable, and if a woman lacks education it will be hard for her to work."<sup>409</sup>

Anyway, it was the acceptance of women in modern industry that opened the doors of education to women. Even before the Chinese Communist Party was in power, the former government had already realized the need to educate women in order to meet the need for skilled labour. Indeed, the educational system has been viewed as a means to reduce social inequality by the new regime.<sup>410</sup> The importance of that was further stressed when the Chinese Communists came into power. Even recent fiction emphasizes the importance of education to women. Of all the contents included in recent fiction, the importance of reducing female illiteracy has been the most recurring theme. The Chinese Communist regime seems to have taken "the educational experience and employment opportunities of urban women as a vehicle to eliminate social inequality."<sup>411</sup>

The chance to pursue education made it more possible for Chinese women to become productive workers, independent of their husbands economically, and to establish an independent identity before marriage.

Looking at the present situation in Communist China, women's educational opportunities have been increased with the increased scope of their employments. "Even in rural areas, peasant schools, spare time schools, and winter schools supplement regular educational opportunities for women." Thus

with the general level of literacy throughout the country raised higher, "the total number of women with primary, secondary, and college education is also higher."<sup>412</sup> Indeed, the Chinese Communists have taken the educational system as a tool to wipe out social inequalities

"both in payment for work and in the type of work itself. At the same time, the educational system is also the effective allocator of occupations and hence a determinant of social status."<sup>413</sup>

Moreover,

"the pre-Cultural Revolution conflict over educational policy, that is, the struggle between a full-time formal system producing a small but highly trained technical elite as opposed to an informal, experimental system aimed at creating educational opportunities for the broadest number of people and inculcating a socialist consciousness among the people reflected the larger issue of how to build socialism in China. The resolution of this conflict would have significant influence on women's access to educational facilities and later, employment opportunities."<sup>414</sup>

Despite the greater efforts put to enlarge women's participation in education, they still form a minority of those educated in formal, full-time schools.<sup>415</sup> The inequality is more obvious at higher educational levels. The higher education in Communist China is still biased in favour of men. For example,

"Peking University has a faculty of 2,500 and enrollment of 3,000 full time students and 5,000 workers, peasants, and soldiers recruited in 1974 to study part time: of these, only a third are women."<sup>416</sup>

At this point, one may argue that the educational policies after the Cultural Revolution somehow do constitute an obstacle on the road toward greater equalities between

the sexes. With the abolition of the entrance examinations for admission to higher educational institutes, the new policies give priorities to children of the workers and of the peasants in gaining access to higher education.<sup>417</sup> It is imaginable that these policies might have prevented children of families other than workers' and peasants' backgrounds from receiving higher education and have stressed the redressing of class inequality over sexual inequality in higher education. By and large, it is true that along with the emancipation of Chinese women under the Chinese Communist regime, a sharp increase in the educational level of the female population has been brought forth.<sup>418</sup>

#### POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Women have gained increasing economic independence, and at the same time, have re-emerged from household confinement. This also has enabled them to feel interested in politics.

As a matter of fact, early from its Yenan days, the Chinese Communist government has been recruiting women as party members. It is not surprising to see Jan Myrdal hear that early in 1951, the Party school in Yenan trained women as female ganbus (i.e. female Party officials). "It was said that as half the population consisted of women, trained

women were needed as well."<sup>419</sup>

The Chinese Communists have been trying to create the situations in which women are represented in different levels of administration. The Chinese Communist government has been dealing with the women's problems in three ways -- "on three fronts."<sup>420</sup> One of these three fronts has been to make women participate in leadership. Both the cadres and the workers as well as the present leadership bodies everywhere in Communist China are realizing the problem of women's under-representation. Special emphases are now being put on recruiting women for leadership posts -- both in the work units, school-boards and political organizations.<sup>421</sup>

It is even evident in the administrative hierarchy. At the top of the administration of the Chinese Communist government

"is of course Madame Soong Ching-ling, Vice-Chairman of the People's Republic, widow of Sun Yat-sen, and eldest sister of Madame Chiang Kai-shek. She is also honorary Chairman of the All-China Democratic Women's Federation. On the State Council, ... there are two women ministers and four vice ministers. The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress has a woman vice chairman and four women members. In the National Peoples' Congress itself, women occupy 150 seats, or 12 per cent of the total. An earlier report stated that, at the primary level, women deputies make up 20 per cent of all people's deputies. Women have also become mayors and magistrates (2.8 per cent), and government functionaries on the level of department heads and bureau directors (3 per cent)."<sup>422</sup>

So, by and large, women in Communist China have gained a noticeable status on the national leadership bodies. An example was given on the women's situations in Luishi



County of Hopi Province where "women (accounted) for 30 per cent of the County's Party and government cadres ... and many of them (held) principal leading posts at various levels."<sup>423</sup>

Furthermore, women are always enthusiastic to be activists for building a new regime. For example in Hunan Province, "in thirteen rural counties and one city of Hunan Province 16,507 activists were selected and trained from the beginning of 1950 to the end of 1952, of whom 2,907, or about 17.6 per cent, were women."<sup>424</sup> There have also been considerable numbers of women representatives in the people's representative councils throughout many provinces all over the country.<sup>425</sup>

Local government has the militia known as "people's soldiers" as a noticeable component of its power structure. Under the new Communist regime, women in new China are regularly recruited into the local militia. There have been women even recruited in the People's Liberation Army (PLA)<sup>426</sup> whose members are highly respected in new China today. Though women's participation in the People's Liberation Army is reportedly even slimmer than in the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, yet these positions are at least in principle open to women.

It is also the case that women are taking a steadily increasing role in the leadership of production teams and work units, e.g. the communes. Generally speaking, in these

spheres the leaders are said to be chosen democratically; all women can participate in deciding who the leaders are to be.<sup>427</sup>

However, one should not overlook the fact that women are still proportionally under-represented in some other leadership bodies, particularly in the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the Party's top leadership group. The proportion of women in the Chinese Communist Party itself (who have the rights to voice out on matters concerning the policy implementation) is only 10 per cent. It shows that "the much-advertised equality of the sexes perhaps does not really spread to the matter of central importance."<sup>428</sup>

Thus, it raises the doubt about whether members of committees and the Chinese Communist Party are really democratically chosen. Perhaps all those examples exist because they are the wives of someone important.<sup>429</sup> Even those women enrolled in the administrative levels of government departments or heads of unions are holding minor positions as compared to the Chairmanship of a Revolutionary Committee or a board of directors. For example:

"of the 170 members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party elected to the Ninth Congress in 1969, 23 are women: workers, peasants, representatives of national minorities, Party cadres, chairwomen or vice-chairwomen of Revolutionary Committees ... only one woman belongs to the Political Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party; Jiang Qing, the third (sic) wife of Chairman Mao."<sup>430</sup>

Nevertheless, the Cultural Revolution really brought

forth a drastic increase in the number of women delegates to national conferences.<sup>431</sup> Moreover, the on-going process of women organizing women's federations -- once accelerated or facilitated by the Cultural Revolution, has also helped a lot to improve the situation.

From an overall point of view, women in China have advanced an incredibly long distance along the road to equality in a very short time -- two or three decades. Within one generation the most glaring inequalities between the sexes had subsided. But men and women in new China are by no means completely equal. In fact, old ideas about certain things being "men's work" and others being "women's work" still remain.<sup>432</sup> These ideas are still reinforced by the system of rewards (e.g. wages) as practised in the communes. Inside the communes, "there certainly is a shift of emphasis from egalitarianism to distribution of incomes at least partly graded according to the performance."<sup>433</sup> Thus, owing to the differences in physical strengths, women are still generally less paid than men, particularly for the jobs that require physical strength.

#### OTHER RELEVANT ADVANCES FOR IMPROVING THE SITUATIONS OF THE CHINESE WOMEN

##### Welfare For Women

Going hand in hand with the intention of the Chinese Communists to emancipate Chinese women are the

provisions of all kinds of welfare. A first noteworthy measure the Chinese Communist Regime initiated is the Labour Insurance Law passed in May, 1951. This Law guarantees special protection for working women and their children. It has decreed equal pay for equal work. It limits the working day to eight hours per day.

"Maternity benefits (give) 56 days' leave with full pay, an additional 14 days for a difficult birth or for twins, and a cash payment of 4 yuan. Pre-natal examination and hospital confinement (is) paid by the enterprise. A woman who (suffers) miscarriage (gets) 30 days' paid leave. They (have) access to canteens, crèches and nurseries, and special diets when they (are) pregnant or unwell."<sup>434</sup>

Indeed, the Constitution of the Chinese Communist Regime had set out the relevant terms in regard to the special protection for working women ever since the formation of the All-China Democratic Women's Federation in 1949.

The National Committee in Defence of Children was formed on November 26, 1951 to further ensure that all the protective laws and policies on children's rights were carried out fully.<sup>435</sup> In addition, from the earliest years, women's magazines and papers were published. They carried articles on feminine hygiene, pregnancy, childbirth and post-natal care and other relevant subjects. These were also reproduced in primers for adult literacy classes. Even the propaganda posters and radio programmes helped preach the subject to women in the countryside. Thus, the health of women has generally been benefited.<sup>436</sup>

As far as the welfare for women in concerned, the

pre-natal care provided by Communist China to expectant mothers has been quite remarkable and widespread.

"Pre-natal care in the urban areas begins with the first examination, at three to six months of pregnancy. After that, the woman is examined once a month; after seven months, she is examined every two weeks. Near term, the frequency of the examination depends on her condition."<sup>437</sup>

In urban districts, all babies are delivered in hospitals. With emphasis put on pre-natal care, "all women who are to give birth in the hospital need to have been examined prior to the time of delivery ..."<sup>438</sup>

Though contraceptives and abortions are free, pre-natal care and child-birth are charged twenty Chinese cents for the first visit and ten Chinese cents the second time. "For an uncomplicated delivery, the hospital stay is from three to five days and there is a slight fee."<sup>439</sup>

However, it is noteworthy that most babies in the countryside are delivered at homes under the help of the mid-wives. The nearby communal hospital is called upon for help when necessary. Usually these mid-wives are trained for a few months. The period of their training varies from place to place.<sup>440</sup> In the countryside, the expectant mothers are taken care of by the bare-foot doctors. After the fifth month of her pregnancy, an expectant mother will be visited and examined regularly at monthly intervals.<sup>441</sup>

Though maternity leaves for expectant mothers usually last for fifty-six days, there are still variations within the system. By and large,

"pre-natal care seems to be universal and delivery is

without anesthesia, both in the cities and in the countryside. Mothers in the cities are entitled to paid maternity leave; in the countryside, maternity leave is not paid, but the woman does not lose seniority, no matter how long she is away from work."<sup>442</sup>

Furthermore, the Chinese Communists have initiated the old-age pension scheme ever since 1953 under the organization of labour insurance funds. Like men, women are entitled to have old-age pensions at the age of fifty if they have worked for twenty years (at for five consecutive years in the jobs they hold at retirement). They are paid "retirement pensions of 50 to 70 per cent of their wages."<sup>443</sup>

Besides, there have been maternity hospitals and clinics established throughout the country. Some small-scale "health stations" have also been set up all over the country to take care of the health of women and their children.<sup>444</sup>

Unfortunately, the pension schemes have not been maintained. In some places, the provisions of the Labour Insurance Law have not been enforced with particular strictness. Even worse has been that the economic depressions in the early 1960's have greatly hindered the improvements in health standards as well as the expension of medical services. This is also owing to the effects of the social, political turmoil of the Cultural Revolution that began in the mid 60's.<sup>445</sup>

Apart from that, the setting up of the communes constituted another great improvement in the provisions of welfare for women in terms of both labour and life.

The provisions of communal services in communes have somehow relieved the burdens of household chores. Those provisions include the mess halls, the child-care centres and nurseries, etc. This was particularly evident during the Great Leap Forward period in the fall of 1958. At that time, the communes were used by the Chinese Communist government to mobilize not only women but the whole population to increase productivity vastly.<sup>446</sup> Consequently,

"(the Chinese Communist government) has set up in China 3,600,000 public mess halls and 4,980,000 nurseries and kindergartens staffed by some 7,000,000 women child-care workers. Thus freed from cooking, child care, and many domestic chores now collectively performed, nearly '100 per cent' of all rural women have joined productive labor in the communes."<sup>447</sup>

However, it is noteworthy that owing to inadequate resources devoted to the commune programmes, they could not be maintained successfully. It was also because of the hostility of the peasants who were opposed to "the attempt to reorganize several traditional villages under a single commune administration dominated by party officials."<sup>448</sup>

#### Birth Control

In order to further enhance the emancipation of the Chinese women, the Chinese Communists have already broken the traditional kinship system. This action resulted in the women's integration into productive life. The new Chinese women have begun to transcend their reproductive roles. In order for a woman to have equal participation in the overall life of the nation, she ought to have her control over her

biology. In other words, it is very important for the Chinese women to know of birth control.

One can say that the Chinese Communist's policy did touch upon the birth control problems even in the early years. The Chinese Communist regime's early rules attempted to regulate the age of marriage as well as the age of having children. Early in 1950, the Chinese government raised the minimum marriage age for men and women. For men it was raised to twenty; for women it was raised to eighteen.

"A dozen years later Communist policy stressed the idea that no man should be a father before twenty-six, no woman a mother before twenty-three. The reason given was that 'the health of young mothers' requires that 'they cannot work properly and effectively if they have too many children in their early years'."449

However, this problem was not very enthusiastically attended to by the Chinese Communists during the early years. When the effects of the spiralling population growth were felt, a change in policy was initiated in 1956. Thus a mass birth control campaign was launched.

"The Ministry of Health demanded that medical and public health organizations at various levels assume the burden of informing people about contraceptives, and that provincial and municipal departments train groups to give such guidance. Abortion was also favoured as a technique of birth control. Abortion and sterilization both became easily available in the years 1956-57."450

As a matter of fact, in the middle of 1957, the Chinese Communist government had a first official full-scale birth control campaign initiated. That was taken "as a matter of women's rights and public health and national



welfare."<sup>451</sup> However, when the Great Leap Forward Campaign was started in 1958 to promote China's agriculture and industry,<sup>452</sup> women were called on to participate fully in the labour force and at the same time to heighten their reproduction rate. The birth control movement came into a standstill quite abruptly. "It was argued that the strength and wealth of China lay in its population."<sup>453</sup>

It is noteworthy that the birth control campaign once met strong resistance from the peasants and workers. They often highly valued having offspring as a safeguard for taking care of them while they grew old.<sup>454</sup>

It was only after the Great Leap Forward that the promotion of birth control became the main issue again. "In 1965, 1,000 mobile medical teams were sent out across the country" to promote birth control.<sup>455</sup> Birth control techniques were even introduced in detail through daily radio programmes.<sup>456</sup>

The effects of such revival of the birth control campaign have been quite remarkable.

"To get birth control now a woman has only to call at the village clinic and she is given a free supply of pills and other devices ... Abortions throughout the country are free, available on request of the woman alone, and are usually performed until after fifty days of pregnancy and this is not usual, she is given one month off."<sup>457</sup>

The most popular of birth control devices have been mainly the oral contraceptives, condoms, various kinds of injections, the I.U.D. insertions and tubal ligations.

Besides, vasectomies are available to men. Abortion and sterilization are free of charge, and are done safely in a hospital and clinic, though abortion is usually permitted only on medical advice.<sup>458</sup>

Thus, with these birth control facilities provided, Chinese women can at least be freed from the tyranny of the recurring child-births. It appears to be congruent with the aim held by "Deputy Shao Li-tzu who first raised the issue of birth control before the Congress (the People's Congress held in Peking in September, 1954)."<sup>459</sup> In that Congress, Deputy Shao Li-tzu explicitly showed that the introduction of birth control measures "was based on the need for protecting and improving the health of hard-working Chinese mothers and affording better opportunities for their children." However, it appears to be that birth control and abortion in Communist China seem not to be taken as the means of freeing women's sexuality. Instead, they appear to be mainly used for the purpose of population planning. Thus, with the importance of birth control stressed, it became merely a female responsibility for the males did not participate enthusiastically enough in the area of birth control.<sup>460</sup>

#### Child-care and Related Measures

The Chinese Communists have also done considerable work in regard to the provision of child-care facilities. For they have realized that:

"household chores and child-care were causing low efficiency among these women and compelling many of them to leave work<sup>461</sup>... The Communist regime having chosen to mobilize women, including mothers, for production, has met the problem of working-mothers by setting up nurseries in both urban and rural communities..."<sup>462</sup>

It is true that great efforts were put in organizing child-care facilities in the immediate post-revolutionary period.

"By 1951, the number of nurseries in the cities had increased ninefold since the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) took power, with more than 157,000 nurseries, kindergartens, and other types of childcare centers providing for some 520,000 children. For agricultural workers there were seasonal nursery units that looked after 800,000 children during the busy farming periods. But there are roughly 100 million young children in China. Thus this catered to less than 2 per cent of the needs, not taking into account that most of the day-care was only of a temporary nature."<sup>463</sup>

It is noteworthy that the child-care facilities are generally made available to take care of children "from the day the mother's maternity leave ends -- approximately six weeks to up to the age he enters school." Meanwhile, there are "feeding stations" established for caring of infants who are from six weeks to eighteen months old. A "feeding station" is a place a worker-mother can be close to her young child. Thus she can take time off to breast-feed her baby. Such a place is therefore located in her working-place. When the child does not need to be close to his mother, he is put to the nursery near his father's working-place. He may be put in a nursery handy to his home.

More common is the phenomenon of grandparents

taking care of the children whose parents are out to work. Of course, it is only feasible in families who have grandparents living with them. Indeed, "people are not forced to take their children to child-care centers. They may make the arrangement they wish."<sup>464</sup>

There are three levels of child-care facilities for children according to their age. The youngest can be put in the feeding stations. Children who are of eighteen months old to three and a half years old can be taken care of by the nurseries. Kindergartens usually take care of children age from three and a half to seven years old.<sup>465</sup> This phenomenon varies from place to place. Not only different from one province to another, this phenomenon varies

"from institution to institution, from city to city, most dramatically from city to countryside ... Most often ... 50 per cent of city children ... attend nurseries, another 50 per cent remain at home, mostly with grandparents. These percentages are lower in the countryside, where fewer children go to nurseries."<sup>466</sup>

By and large, there have been nurseries and creches set up almost all through the country since the Chinese Communist Party took power. They are organized either by factories, governmental organizations or even schools. As far as the nurseries themselves are concerned, they are not free of charge. For a child to be taken care of there, the parents are usually charged ten to eleven yuan per month. This fee is for food and is the same as it would cost for

the child to eat at home. With that much, the child is given three hot meals a day. Whenever a child is ill, that child will be treated in a special room where a full-time nurse is on hand. If a child is seriously ill, a doctor will be called for or the child will be sent to a hospital. That sick child will be given free child-care. In order to meet the need of few percent of parents who have to work in the rural districts during the work-week, overnight facilities are also available at child-care centres. Those couples usually leave their children at the kindergartens day and night through the work-week. They visit their children occasionally but only take them home on the days when they are off. It is not usual for children to stay overnight in the kindergarten, unless "one member of the couple works a night shift at a factory or if the parents have a meeting or no one to watch the children at home."<sup>467</sup>

It is noteworthy that child-care in the cities seems less casual and less relaxed than that in the rural districts, e.g. the commune.<sup>468</sup> Besides paying for the food, many nurseries do not have sufficient resources to provide quilts and sheets as well as clothes for the children. Thus their parents usually have to provide these, though some urban day-care centres do have bed sheets and colourful quilts provided free for the children.<sup>469</sup>

Nevertheless, owing to the lack of affluent resources, full-time (twenty-four hours) nurseries are still

few in number. Perhaps it is because they are more costly than the part-time ones. It is particularly the case in such a big city as Shanghai. People working in the nursery room of most factories lack special training too.<sup>471</sup> During the great trend of mass mobilization of women (particularly peasant movement) for production, e.g. the Great Leap Forward Campaign in 1958, active efforts had been made to set up nurseries in most rural communities. But these were mainly on a seasonal basis. Because of the lack of trained personnel, most of these nursery-units at that time were,

"staffed by women too old for active agricultural labour but glad to earn some 'labour points'.... These 'labour points' were paid for by the agricultural mutual-aid teams of which the working mothers were members, the costs of child care becoming a part of the cost of agricultural production in such cases."<sup>472</sup>

Owing to the seasonal basis of most such nurseries and the constant great demands for them, such child-care services are far from being sufficient. It was evident in the early post-revolutionary period. A vivid example was manifested through a description in a letter to the editor of the Peking Jen-min-jie'h pao i.e. (Peking People's Daily) on March 8, 1952.

"In Peking there were only eleven nurseries before the liberation, and these have increased to sixty-five (in February, 1951), fifty-seven of which have been attached to public offices. Recently four nursing rooms have been added. But in Peking there are over four hundred government offices, over eight hundred schools, and over thirty comparatively large factories. Because of the absence of nurseries and nursing rooms in the vast majority of the government offices, women cadres cannot work with ease of mind, and some of them

have even stopped working. Some unmarried women comrades, seeing the burden of motherhood are unwilling to get married, and those already married resort to contraception."<sup>473</sup>

It was the case that day-care facilities in most urban areas decreased even in the periods of rapid economic growth in the mid 50's. It was reported that in 1951, there were 520,000 children under day-care in the urban areas, but in 1955 only 165,000 children were taken care of through day-care facilities in the urban areas. In 1955 only 4,000 nurseries were providing child-care services to the workers in manufacturing and mining enterprises. Thus they took care of about 127,000 children. Besides, there were only 687 public neighbourhood nurseries caring for about 38,000 children in 60 cities.<sup>474</sup> That was because of an industrial slump in 1954. It resulted in lesser demands for labour. Thus it was felt that employing women was too troublesome for "nurseries would then have to be set up and maternity leave with pay provided."<sup>475</sup>

At this point, it seems evident that women under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party have become vulnerable to (or rather are-the victims of) the fluctuations in the national economies. Not surprisingly, the attitude regarding employment of women as "uneconomical and presenting too many problems" was under open attack from both Ts'ai Ch'ang -- a Chinese Communist Party central committee member and Yang Chih-hua -- an active feminist, at the All-China Democratic Women's Congress, and Party

Congress in September 1956.<sup>476</sup>

It was only until the Great Leap Forward policies were carried through (in late 1958) that the provision of child-care facilities began to be improved. By 1959, it was claimed that there were 4,980,000 nurseries and kindergartens staffed by some 7,000,000 women child-care workers.

"By 1960, it was claimed that in the rural communes 80 per cent of all pre-school children were being taken care of. In the cities it was reported that there was a fiftyfold increase between 1951 and 1958 in kindergartens taking care of 25.5 million children. Forty-seven million children were supposed to be under care of permanent child-care organizations."<sup>477</sup>

It is a matter of fact that though the pace of improvement in the provision of child-care facilities is still slow, it is improving.

"In 1971, 50 per cent of all city children between the ages of one and three attended nurseries, while 10 per cent were cared for by non-working mothers, and the remaining 40 per cent were looked after by grandparents, neighbours, or family friends. In that same year, over 80 per cent of the children between the ages of three and seven in urban areas were attending kindergartens."<sup>478</sup>

Nevertheless, it is the case that however good the child-care facilities have become, there are still problems remaining when both parents have to work. "Taking them to, and collecting them from, the creche added to the length of the working day, school holidays were a problem ..."<sup>479</sup> Above all, it seems to me that complete emancipation of women will exist only when there is an overall affluence in the nation's material goods. Only then can all trivial services be provided or done by the nation instead of having them assigned to housewives.



## CHAPTER X

### SOME CONCLUSIONS

#### OVERVIEW OF THE CHINESE WOMEN'S SITUATIONS IN NEW CHINA

Despite the growing attempts to reveal the situations inside post-revolutionary Chinese society, information on the status of women in Communist China has been scarce. This is true in regard to the status of women in China, during the 1960's particularly. As in other industrializing countries, the general improvement in the social, economic, and political status of women has not simply been an "inevitable" accompaniment of economic development; it is also the result of ideological forces exerted by both the government and the women's organizations under the guidance of the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>480</sup> The Chinese Communist Party has ideologically coloured the women's movement in China and has given it a unique character. The second noteworthy point is that the women's movement in new China has given birth to a new womanhood that is marked by its freedom and independence. However, it "also carries tensions and conflicts not unlike those experienced by modern women in most non-socialist

countries."<sup>481</sup>

One has to note that the oppression of women is a matter caused by the special conditions affecting women of all social groups. That kind of oppression is inherited in "the most intimate, private areas of life, pervades culture, tradition and historical experience," and in some ways benefits men. The revolution has emancipated women to such an extent as to get rid of the traditional social structures that strengthened the old regime. But this process is in danger of stopping short of full liberation if the costs are too great.<sup>482</sup>

Furthermore, the Chinese Communist regime has been suffering from pressing economic scarcities. Not surprisingly, the new Chinese regime has "not been willing or able to make the effort required to liberate women fully ..." Thus, the attempts to improve the status of women are forced to be given up when they become too costly "either in term of direct economic costs such as child care and household services or political resistance and disruption resulting from attempts to change the family or to bring women equally into position." Thus, it seems to me that revolutions which occur in advanced industrial societies could provide better chances to liberate women than those which occur in the developing societies.<sup>483</sup> Only the process of industrialization can change the traditional function and structure of the family in a society. Only under that situation will

a change in "the entire complex social function of woman" be effected. The whole series of changes in the structure and function of the family can be significantly speeded up through a Marxist analysis of the contemporary family in society.<sup>484</sup>

The women's liberation in modern China was firstly facilitated by two interacting forces: the feminists and their partial influences on the revolutionary ideology. However, these forces had a potentially unequal commitment to female emancipation as such. The former force was a group of militant and competent women. They fought for the women's liberation within the context of a free and new society. But the Chinese Communist ideology held that it was necessary to liberate women in order to create a new society.

Despite its long-range goals, women's liberation still remains a central ideological practice in the Chinese Communist revolution. It is still so "even when attacks on the oppression of women in the family and inequality in economic and political life (decline)." Meanwhile

"a 'star system' with the double advantage of coopting the minority of active talented women and providing propaganda support for the ideology of women's liberation came to absorb the energy of the feminists' drive for the emancipation of all women."<sup>485</sup>

However great the emphasis has been put on fulfilling the revolutionary promises, the attainment has been symbolic in which only individual women are elevated "rather than a

substantial commitment to end the oppression of women as a social group." Besides the Chinese women were not united in the pursuit of equality during the revolutionary period. Neither the revolutionary feminists nor their ideological commitment could form a definite block that was strong enough to "maintain the impetus for change when the costs became high."<sup>486</sup>

All in all, considerable advances have been attained in regard to the status of the Chinese women. They are more literate and free to participate fully in various aspects of society. Not surprisingly, the new woman in new China is characterized

"as a robust, healthy looking, and cheerful person whose bountiful energies are devoted to work and studies and whose unfailing loyalties belong to the production<sup>487</sup> brigade, the commune, the militia, and the party."

Coming forth hand in hand with this was the remarkable change in the attitudes of husbands toward their wives in families. In return, the modern Chinese women try not to take their liberation as a form of conflict between men and women.

"They see the conflict in their society rather as one between new ideas and remnants of feudal thinking."<sup>488</sup> However, it is noteworthy that the changes in attitudes and ideas are still slow in rural areas.

An example is that, particularly in rural areas, most families still highly value children, especially sons. So women still have to bear the burden of frequent child-bearings that seems to be the means for them to gain status.

Prior to the mass popularity of family planning in the 1960's, "the status which constant child-bearing brought a women in the family was in sharp conflict with the social status that productive labour might otherwise have conferred on her."<sup>489</sup>

The past policy of avoiding the modernization of agriculture was defended in part as a means to enhance women's participation in this sector. However, it could be a factor to increase the workload of those Chinese women who had both to work and to take care of their children and household chores.<sup>490</sup>

Besides, the provision of communal services for child-care and eating facilities helps a bit alleviate the bulk of housework and child-care burden which had once to be taken up by the young housewives. However, such services are not sufficiently provided or operated only on seasonal or temporary basis. Thus, once a young housewife is mobilized to work outside the house, her mother-in-law will have to care for her grandchildren and do menial work that had once been "the special duties of the young daughter-in-law."

Generally speaking, women in new China have secured a new sense of worth and self-respect. This is already a complete departure from the traditional Chinese society. However, the new woman in China is still not completely free from being discriminated against. As has been examined before, in the occupational world and within the Chinese Communist Party, Chinese women are still not in very

favourable situations. It is most apparent in sex-segregation in ordinary work as well as in the occupational spheres.<sup>491</sup>

As a matter of fact, many new Chinese women have experienced role conflicts because they are not satisfied with their roles of being housewives. They rather prefer to have economic independence and also the status of workers in their own rights. This role conflict is particularly salient among those married women in new China.

Besides, this role conflict is further complicated by the conflicting demands of the state and their personal interests.

"In Communist literature, a woman's happiness is invariably depicted as the result of an inner transformation involving the pains of self-examination and self-denial. The happy wife is one who succeeds in adjusting her life patterns and thinking in accordance with the new society. It is only in this way that she can maintain her claim over the affection and respect of her husband."<sup>492</sup>

Nevertheless, the Chinese Communist regime has actually brought changes which have aroused the reactions of the Chinese women. These reactions vary according to persons and social classes as well. It is noteworthy that:

"many women with modern education have been, in theory ardent supporters of woman's complete emancipation and equality but have been unable to put any of their dreams into practice and in their families enjoy fewer rights than women factory workers."<sup>493</sup>

Many women factory workers themselves still have conservative attitudes and ideas. They do not trust women's equality, instead they demand for a dominating husband. Thus the discrimination of husbands toward wives still exists.<sup>494</sup>

For a peasant woman or slave girl who was once illiterate, the new-won freedom, self-respect, social status and education have been the changes brought by the new regime. However, these changes do not come without any costs. The costs incurred to bring forth such changes are incessant hard labour, group pressure, increasing self-denial, conformity and loss of privacy -- e.g. the restrictions on the relationships between the sexes.<sup>495</sup> These inevitably give a feeling that the women of China have shaken off their traditional grievances, yet their destiny has become subjected to a new external force.<sup>496</sup> The women's movement in new China is under strict Communist direction. It has become the Chinese Communists' general tool instead of being an independent militant movement fighting merely for the interests of women.<sup>497</sup> Moreover, it is further manifested through the facts that they are massively mobilized for economic reconstruction whenever the regime needs to do so for any economic campaigns. Although women in new China are no longer bound by the old traditions, yet they have become "subject to new constraints by the Communist regime."<sup>498</sup> Though under the rule of the Chinese Communists extended-families seem to have lost their traditional significances, yet families are still taken as the basic social units in modern Chinese society. This is further clarified in the argument held by Nancy Milton stating that the demands of new Chinese women never included the total abolition of the

family.<sup>499</sup> However, the type of authority that the family exercises is over ridden by the primacy of the political authority.<sup>500</sup>

Even the marriage choices of the Chinese women are now subject to political control.

"The criteria for marriage choice now has (sic) to include political acceptability. After marriage, a woman's duties in the home are likewise under constant public scrutiny; her home life has to be subordinated to her duties as a citizen and a productive member of the Communist society."<sup>501</sup>

Thus, it is clear that the interests of the state are always taking precedence whenever there is a conflict of interests between those of the state and of the individuals.

The Chinese Communist regime is not unaware of all these situations. Indeed, a campaign has been carried out to criticize Confucius and Lin Piao. The significance of such campaign

"is to date the most concentrated and analytical attempt to integrate the redefinition of the female role into a nationwide effort to change the self-image and expectation of both men and women."<sup>502</sup>

All these were to aim at arousing the confidence of women through their own individual and collective abilities.

Though considerable equalities are enjoyed by women, clearly defined sex-roles still exist in the Chinese economy. Most pronounced sexual determination of roles is evident in the unpaid household labour. The most resistant obstacle to full equality in sex-roles is still the patriarchal division of labour. Just as evident in the agricultural



sphere, there are strong forces operating "to make women's contribution to farm work marginal." Women's participation becomes fully significant only when there is even demand for labour throughout the year and .

"when domestic work can be lightened, collectivized or shared with the family, and when more women do jobs which are well remunerated in terms of work-points."<sup>503</sup>

All in all, village life in new China is still not easy. Women are still required to work hard for survival and for the economic progress. Though their emancipation is still far from complete, yet they have more opportunities to carry on their struggle at least.<sup>504</sup>

Furthermore, as far as the wages in industry inside the communes are concerned, "women do not receive any payment when on maternity leaves."<sup>505</sup> It indicates that the sex-discrimination of roles is still strongly influencing the reward system, e.g. inside the cooperatives.

Apart from that, the long-standing attitude held by the Chinese Communist Party is manifested in the experiences of women Communist Party intellectuals. For an example, Ting Ling -- Chinese Communist Party's member and a prominent writer once sharply criticized the official leadership in 1942 for enhancing "the difficulties and disillusionment of women living at the Marxist capital of Yanan." Though the position of women there has been improved, Ting Ling stated that "it did not measure up to the theories the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) proclaimed about equal rights." She further pointed out that those

promises made by the top party leaders were empty and not supported by action. Just because of these criticisms, Ting Ling was forced to reform her attitudes. She was forced to hold that her ideas on feminism were outdated.<sup>506</sup> She was purged once again in 1957 because she spoke against the party's line on marriage and love at the episode of the "Hundred Flowers Bloom." The party-line by then was inclined to have coercive attitudes on sexuality and divorce. She accused the Party of defending "hierarchical privileges against democratic and egalitarian demands by the masses." Perhaps this is the factor that helps perpetuate the clearly defined sex-roles evidently revealed during the collectivization movement (through the 1950's). Thus, "however free, (the new Chinese women) are still submitted to influences of politics" to a definite extent.<sup>507</sup> The communes, with the collective provision of services like the creches and mess halls, could release a woman for jobs of a more manly kind. However,

"the communized woman is still wife and mother. (and sometimes generalized wife and mother, if she has to work in cookhouse and creche), (her continuing domestic obligations still make her more than) an incidentally female version of the male worker."<sup>508</sup>

Ai-li Chin has argued that it is inevitable and expectable that there will be an enforced type of political and social participation of women if the Chinese Communist government continues present ideology of massive mobilization.<sup>509</sup>

As far as women's human dignity and material benefits

are concerned, they are related to the nature of the power structure of the new regime, as well as to "the intrinsic interests of the individual regardless of the sex."<sup>510</sup>

It is true that massive women's participation in productive jobs and community work like neighbourhood factories has at least given the Chinese women excellent opportunity. However that opportunity may not endure. Though chances have been created for women to get experience and authority in their communities, these jobs do not confer to them full economic independence though these jobs have brought them supplementary income. These employments can only bring them less money, less fringe benefits, and less job security than the regular jobs.<sup>511</sup>

Equality between the sexes "is still far from complete."<sup>512</sup> There is still evidence that women are defined as backward or useless. They are even neglected for promotion and further training. As a matter of fact, the Chinese Communist government really appreciates that women's struggle for equality in China is still far away from completion. Thus it is quite sure that the women in new China will progress because they are critically conscious of the remaining inequalities and discrimination they have to face.<sup>513</sup> They do not "see men per se, as their enemy," That means their struggle is not the one between the sexes. Their only enemy is "the feudal ways of thinking and acting, the capitalist and bourgeois ways of doing things."<sup>514</sup>

Anyhow,

"only time can tell what permanent structural results will emerge from ... a deliberate redirection of social forces on a massive scale, for changes in the position of women will come about not only with each new policy affecting women as such but also indirectly as a consequence of sweeping changes in other parts of the social system."<sup>515</sup>

Perhaps the particular economic development policies practised by the Chinese Communist government will in the long run have a special potential to create a real social and material equality of opportunity.<sup>516</sup>

HOW FAR HAVE THE WOMEN IN COMMUNIST CHINA BEEN  
EMANCIPATED? (AS COMPARED WITH THE WOMEN'S  
EMANCIPATION IN THE U.S.S.R.)

Like all other socialist societies, China has been enthusiastic in building socialism. It is apparently manifested through the radical policies practised by Communist China to motivate mass participation in all aspects of social life. In so doing, she has, by and large, created a more favourable atmosphere and force to efficiently challenge all kinds of inequality, including sex-inequality. Her policies like those associated with "both the Great Leap Forward and the Socialist Education -- Cultural Revolution," at least appear to have the potential "of integrating the masses of women into the labor force in the process of a socialist construction."<sup>517</sup> Perhaps Communist China tries to benefit the Chinese women by following the guidance of Engels and Marx. As a matter of fact, Engels held that

modernization of industry necessitated and made possible the participation of women. Yet this was the source of her exploitation and was also her potential emancipation.<sup>518</sup>

Theoretically, the experience that Chinese women got during those periods of massive mobilization seems to be congruent to the Marxist idea. For Marxism takes sex-oppression as a consequence of class-oppression. However, it has been viewed by feminists, as separate from class-oppression.

"Marxists in general have never explored either the precise nature of the relationship between sex and class or had very much to say about priorities in the process by which sexual exploitation and oppression are eliminated at any given time."<sup>519</sup>

It is noteworthy that women's liberation has always been seen, not as part of the process of building socialism, but as a result of socialism by the dominant Marxist revolutionaries. For example, Lenin held that only socialism could relieve women from their domestic drudgery when the economy should change from small household economy to a socialist form.<sup>520</sup> This was particularly experienced by women in new China during the 1960s. They were affected by the contradictory and conflicting forces arising from the government's economic development strategy. It was evidently the case among the urban female labour force. Class polarization occurred among the female population. This resulted in quite noticeable differentiations and cleavages of the female labour force. Hence, there appeared

a female technocratic elite who were different from the vast majority of the labour force. This implies that class struggle cannot be overlooked in the struggle against sexual discrimination. Both should go hand in hand. Experience revealed that, "those policies which benefited the working-class women, also benefited the whole working class."<sup>521</sup> Nevertheless this is not always a clear phenomenon. The different interests being strived for may not come forth at the same time.

"The struggle for female liberation must therefore pay very close attention to ideological factors as well as socio-economic ones, but the notion of sexual struggle when divorced from a clear conception of class interest does not necessarily lead to liberation for the overwhelming majority of women."<sup>522</sup>

Superficially, Communist China is not much different from other socialist countries in regard to the achievement in liberating women. Nevertheless, differences do exist in the extent of success when compared with the other countries. At this point, I would like to compare the situations of women in Communist China with those in the Soviet Union to see whether the women's liberation movement in China is different from that in Russia, and, if so, to what extent they are different.

All in all, there is a similarity between these two countries, for they are both socialist countries. However, owing to the differences in time when the revolutions took place in these two countries, socialist ideology influenced the development of the U.S.S.R. far earlier than it did

China's. It is obvious in the fact that the Socialist revolution succeeded in 1917 in Russia but the Communist revolution in China did not take place until 1949. It was not long after the 1917 Socialist revolution that the Soviet Union engaged in massive economic development plans, e.g. The Five Year Plans that began around 1928. Though Communist China also carried out socialist economic developments after the establishment of the regime, e.g. The Five Year Plans and collectivization, these began only in the 50's. There had already been a time-lag of at least 30 years -- as compared with those in the U.S.S.R. Within such an interval, Soviet society had already undergone a series of economic and political developments.

As far as marriage reforms are concerned, there had been a series of laws implemented to protect women's rights of marriage and divorce between 1917 and 1921 in the Soviet Union. Subsequent promulgations of more marriage reform laws occurred in the late 30's and early 40's.<sup>523</sup> But the formal marriage law in China was not promulgated until 1950 when the Chinese Communist regime had been established. Besides, the provisions of welfare and protective measures for the working women in the Soviet Union came out shortly after the 1917 revolution. But for Communist China such provisions were not heard of until the 50's. Even up to the present time provisions of these measures are not yet fully executed.

Female education in the Soviet Union is more advanced

than in Communist China. In the Soviet regime, general illiteracy has been combated.<sup>524</sup>

"According to the 1970 census, women constitute 53.9 per cent of the total population of the U.S.S.R. and 51 per cent of the working population. Forty-five and two-tenths per cent of all women (as compared with 52.2 per cent of all men) have completed higher and secondary education or have incomplete educations."<sup>525</sup>

Thus more and more women have become better educated. Consequently, the overall educational status of women in the Soviet Union is at par with that of men. That perhaps is mainly because all people in the Soviet Union are entitled to have universal, free and compulsory seven to ten-year general school and easily accessible higher education. But the situation in Communist China is different. Illiteracy is still a problem among men and women. It is particularly salient among the peasant women. Though there have been anti-illiteracy campaigns run by the Chinese Communist government, yet universal education is still not on a compulsory basis. While educational opportunity is becoming more equal at the primary level, for higher educational attainment, the Chinese women are not as advanced as Soviet women who enjoy a status more at par with men's.

As far as occupational statuses of the women in the Soviet Union and Communist China are concerned, they are also different. Owing to early industrial and economic developments in the Soviet Union, women have long been participating fully and holding important posts at various occupational levels. But in China, though women's participation has been



enlarged since the Communist regime came into reign, yet women are still clustered in the more lowly skilled kinds of jobs.<sup>526</sup> This is perhaps because in the Soviet Union, professional and occupational skill-trainings are widely provided to Soviet women. Also, the provision of more thorough welfare facilities has created a situation that enables their women to participate freely in the occupational world as they like. But although the occupational world in Communist China has been open to greater women's participation, Chinese women are still in a less favourable situation as compared with men. Their situation is even far behind the standard of emancipation that the Soviet women are now enjoying. The most remarkable difference between these two countries can be found in the occupational spheres that require high skill and scientific knowledge. It is a matter of fact that 40 per cent of all scientists in the Soviet Union are women. They also constitute seventy per cent of all teachers.

Besides, modern Russia has wiped out

"the so-called historic aversion of women to technology ... Every third engineer in a country richest in the world in engineers is a woman and the number increases every year."<sup>527</sup>

Most strikingly is that Soviet women can even participate in the aero-space activities. There has already been a female astronaut. Thus not only is Communist China incomparable to the Soviet Union in this aspect, but even the well-developed western countries do not have such

advancement yet.

For the women's participation in general politics, the Soviet Union has provided chances for women to participate widely in local politics, though women's representation in higher party bodies has been trivial.<sup>528</sup> Women in Communist China, though symbolically or otherwise represented in different levels of state politics, have less representation in the Central Committee of the Communist Party than Soviet women.<sup>529</sup>

On the whole, the attainment of women's emancipation in the Soviet Union is far more advanced than in Communist China. Though the women's emancipation movement in Communist China has been moving forward, yet its attainment at present is only comparable to the Soviet Union during the 1920's and 1930's. This is mainly because of the differences in the time when they were influenced by developments stimulated by the socialist movement. The Soviet Union became a Socialist state in 1917 when China was then still under bourgeois rule. It can be said that only through the socialist motivation of collectivization and modernization that chances have been developed to liberate women in the Soviet Union. Since China became a socialist state later than Russia, not surprisingly there are discrepancies in the stages of development reached by these two countries and hence in the extent of women's liberation.

From an overall point of view, the Soviet Union has

attained greater success than Communist China in liberating women. But in certain aspects like the birth control facilities and related attainment, the Soviet Union may not be better than Communist China. As the latest materials about birth control issues in new China have revealed, the Communist Chinese government has exerted great efforts to publicize contraceptives and birth control devices to Chinese women. Not surprisingly, as a consequence, oral contraceptives

"may now be being used by 15 million women. In the rural communes near Peking it is claimed that 40 per cent of fertile women are using this method ..."530

Besides, as has been mentioned in the section concerning birth control,

"pioneer work has been done in developing 'paper pills', which, like vacuum aspiration in the field of abortion, appear to be a genuine leap forward."531

This has been the main method of abortion used in most rural areas inside China. Indeed, "China is the home of the vacuum aspiration method of terminating pregnancy."532 It is also noteworthy that abortion is now widely used and readily available in the cities at least. Thus it is now claimed that there are 20,000 commune hospitals that can perform abortion when required.

However, in the U.S.S.R., induced-abortion rates are high because of "the non-availability or non-application of oral contraceptives and the ~~inefficient~~ distribution of poor-quality, aesthetically unacceptable condoms."533 Thus in this aspect of birth control, Communist China seems to

have attained a greater progress than the Soviet Union.

Apart from that discrepancy, the women's liberation in the Soviet Union can lead Communist China in emancipating women in other aspects, e.g. women's participation in occupations and education, etc. Perhaps that is because of the fact that the Soviet Union suffered a heavy loss of manpower during the two world wars and consequently the Soviet women had to take over men's places in various fields. However, Communist China did not encounter such circumstance.

It is possible that on her way toward further emancipation of women, Communist China will be able to attain the same extent of success that the Soviet Union is now experiencing. It will not be surprising if Communist China has a tendency to follow whatever example the Soviet Union has set in liberating women. But it will take at least quite a period before Communist China can catch up.

#### FUTURE TRENDS OF WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION IN COMMUNIST CHINA

In order to predict the future trend of the women's emancipation movement in a country, we have to note that more satisfactory emancipation soon comes after the freeing of the housewives from housework.<sup>534</sup> Only under that condition can it be possible for women to have free and wide-ranging participation in non-domestic work. Thus women can experience greater equality with and economic independence from their husbands.<sup>535</sup>

All in all, it is noteworthy that the freeing of housewives from housework cannot be complete unless material abundance is attained through economic prosperity. As Leon Trotsky has said, a great obstacle in the path toward greater emancipation of women is the scarcity of material wealth.<sup>536</sup> In addition,

"the main work of preparation (for such progress) is carried out along more basic lines: the development of industry, which will give the countryside the technical basis for industrialized agriculture; and a cooperative form of distribution of economic benefits, without which it is impossible to work out new attitudes toward woman and child."<sup>537</sup>

Change in the status of women as a social group in a country has a direct relation with the degree of modernization affected by the ruling regime.<sup>538</sup> Indeed, it is hard to predict to what extent the women in Communist China will be emancipated because what progress the women's emancipation movement will make depends almost completely on the discretion of the leadership of the government. That prediction is extremely difficult to make without bias. Perhaps William Goode may have made the most able predictions. He predicts that though there are still many problems associated with the constitution of communes, the existence of communes will persist for several upcoming decades, may be in a modified form. Besides, he predicts that with industrialization and greater economic and political stability,

"there will be a swing back toward a more definite sex division of labor and toward the family as a

primary unit of identification."<sup>539</sup>

The present post-Mao leadership in China is somewhat like a "collective leadership" since there appears to be no major political figure who has the potential to pursue Mao's revolutionary vision. Thus it is rather impossible to have any successful implementation of the Maoist policies to any extreme extent. The present policies are directed toward a moderate and pragmatic ideology. Economic development and further modernization are given priority. Thus specialization of skills will prevail. In so far as the Chinese women remain under-represented in the chances of being trained in special professional skills, they will still have small chances to drastically improve their occupational status.

Furthermore, with further industrialization and modernization in Communist China, future regional differences in the progress of women's economic and political participation can be anticipated. Indeed, industrialization does play a part in lessening the inequality between the sexes. So the women in the rural areas of Communist China are bound to experience comparatively greater sexual inequality. For it has been the case that progress of industrialization is slower in rural areas than in the urban areas. Industrialization is impossible without greater degrees of specialization of skills. It has been aforementioned that women in rural parts of mainland China have generally been under-represented in attainment of highly-skilled training. So

they will still be under-represented in certain spheres of social and occupational participation.

Meanwhile, China is experiencing a gradual decline in the force of ideology. Thus, it is very likely that Chinese society will remain stratified in terms of status and hierarchy.<sup>540</sup> This will set a limit to the improvement of the status of women in new China. The Party will continue to play a crucial role in perpetuating the stratification in society and in the Party hierarchy as well. It is imaginable that women will remain under-represented in some fields.

Nevertheless, the social status of women as a whole will still be promoted. At least during the phases of further economic developments and further modernization, women can still be of use as a precious labour force in new China. As a matter of fact, new China in the post-Mao era has been progressing toward further modernization. It is thus possible for the new Communist leadership to further emancipate the Chinese women.

However, it is doubtful how much further the status of the new women will be promoted once the country has attained a certain extent of economic prosperity and modernization. Will that be the time for the Chinese women to enjoy a far greater degree of liberation on account of the elimination of scarcity of material wealth? Or will that be the time when women in this Communist country are no longer needed as an indispensable and precious labour force, and when China will cease to give priority to the question of

women's emancipation as part of her socialist ideologies?

It is quite true, at this moment, that there are still real structural constraints working against further liberation of women in new China. But the Chinese Communist government does recognize that special attention is needed to help remove the remaining constraints that obstruct the whole process of women's emancipation.<sup>541</sup> Thus, the masses of women inside new China have no choice on their present lot. They are bound to follow wherever the tide of the women's liberation movement goes. However far the progress will be in the movement, there is for sure a limit. It is very likely that women in new China can experience the sense of emancipation only to the stage when the need for a large supply of labour stops growing owing to the attainment of economic affluence. But that is still a distance for new China to strive for ...



FOOTNOTES

## FOOTNOTES

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., as illustrated in pp. 284-285.

<sup>5</sup> Olga Lang, Chinese Family and Society, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940, p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> Jan Myrdal, A Report from a Chinese Village, New York: William Hiennemann, Ltd., pp. 204-205.

<sup>7</sup> Marcia Jean Chan and Candice Cyndia Chan, eds., Going Back, U.S.A., 1973, p. 85.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., as an illustration quoted from a conversation with an old Sian woman.

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<sup>10</sup> Dowty and Goldwasser, Huan-Ying: Workers' China, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975, p. 132.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>15</sup> Dorothy R. Blitsten, The World of Family. A Comparative Study of Family Organization in their Social and Cultural Settings, New York: Random Press, 1963, p. 84.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>19</sup> As quoted from Aline K. Wong, "Women in China: Past and Present" in Carolyn J. Matthiasson, ed., Many Sisters, Women in Cross Cultural Perspectives, N.Y.: The Free Press, 1970, p. 230.

<sup>20</sup> Sidel, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> Blitsten, op. cit., p. 99.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 99-100.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>25</sup> Gerald R. Leslie, The Family in Social Context, New York: Oxford U. Press, 1967, p. 92.

<sup>26</sup> Lang, op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>27</sup> Marion J. Levy, Jr., The Family Revolution in Modern China, N.Y.: Otagon Books, 1963, p. 149.

<sup>28</sup> Sidel, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Groll, "The Movement to Criticize Confucius and Lin Piao: On Women of China", SIGNS Journal of Women in Culture and Society, Vol. 2, No. 1, Spring, 1977, pp. 158-159.

<sup>30</sup> Levy, op. cit., p. 148.

<sup>31</sup> Lang, op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>32</sup> Leslie, op. cit., p. 91.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., and Blitsten, op. cit., pp. 104-105.

<sup>34</sup> Lang, op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>35</sup> Levy, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>37</sup> Hsiao Hsia, ed., China, its People, its Society and its Culture, New Haven: HARP Press, 1960, p. 159.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 159-161.

<sup>39</sup> Levy, op. cit., p. 148.

<sup>40</sup> Chan and Chan, eds., op. cit., p. 85.

<sup>41</sup>Matthiasson, op. cit., p. 232; Levy, op. cit., p. 145; also Sidel, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>42</sup>As illustrated in Matthiasson, op. cit., p. 232; also Sidel, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>43</sup>As illustrated in Davin, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>47</sup>Matthiasson, op. cit., p. 232.

<sup>48</sup>Davin, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>49</sup>Lang, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>51</sup>Matthiasson, op. cit., pp. 232-233.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Davin, op. cit., pp. 10-11.

<sup>54</sup>Levy, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 75

<sup>56</sup>Blitsten, op. cit., p. 108.

<sup>57</sup>Levy, op. cit., p. 78.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., and p. 81.

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<sup>63</sup>Davin, op. cit., p. 72.

<sup>64</sup>Lang, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>65</sup>Patai, ed., op. cit., p. 412.

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APPENDIX A

## Chapter I: General Principles

Article 1 "the arbitrary and compulsory feudal marriage system, which is based on the superiority of man over woman ... is hereby abolished. The new Democratic marriage system, which is based on free choice of partners, on monogamy, on equal rights for both sexes, and on the protection of the lawful interests of women and children, shall be put into effect."

Article 2 prohibits polygamy, concubinage, child betrothal, interference with remarriage of widows, marriage by purchase

## Chapter II: Contracting of Marriage

Article 3 marriage by mutual willingness

Article 4 minimum marriage age: twenty for males, eighteen for females

Article 6 marriage requires only registering in person with People's Government

## Chapter III: Rights and Duties of Husband and Wife

Article 7 "Husband and wife are companions living together and shall enjoy equal status in the home."

- Article 8 "Husband and wife are in duty bound to love, respect, assist, and look after each other, to live in harmony, to engage in production to care for their children, and to strive jointly for the welfare of a new society."
- Article 9 both have the right to free choice of occupations and social activities
- Article 10 both have equal rights to possession and management of family property
- Article 11 both have the right to use their own family names
- Article 12 both have the right to inherit property

#### Chapter IV: Relations between Parents and Children

- Article 13 no infanticide
- Article 15 illegitimate children have the same rights as lawful children. If the father can be identified, he must support the children.

#### Chapter V: Divorce

- Article 17 "Divorce shall be granted when husband and wife both desire it."

Article 18     A husband can't divorce a pregnant wife nor  
a wife with a child under one year of age.  
This restriction does not apply to women.

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